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The Explicitness of the Everyday:

Pursuing Meaningful Lives in the Context of Intentional Community in the Northwest United States

Heather Lynes

PhD in Social Anthropology
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I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Abstract

Intentional communities are distinctive socio-cultural contexts which encourage and enable their residents to: live according to explicit beliefs, values and morals and pursue goods that extend beyond the self in an assessable manner in order that progress might be recognized. As such, intentional communities are experienced by their residents as more conducive for the realisation of meaningful lives than 'mainstream' contexts in contemporary America. This thesis supports this claim through exploring the everyday activities through which residents of an intentional community in the Northwest United States worked to build meaningful lives for themselves, and those with whom they associate. A meaningful life, in this distinctive context, is understood to be constituted both by living according to one's beliefs, values and morals, as well as contributing to the pursuit of goods that are outside the self. The analysis is based on fourteen months of fieldwork with a rural intentional community known as Cedar River, twelve months of which were spent living in the community and participating in every facet of community life as though I were a community member.

In this thesis, intentional community is understood to be a context for the construction, negotiation and actualisation of individual and communal goals which are informed by beliefs, values and morals that might be considered 'alternative' from the perspective of the ambient society. Thus, intentional community residents' pursuits of meaningful lives are socio-culturally distinct, rendering them particularly well suited to anthropological investigation where the primary concern is on the role of culture and society in shaping individuals' ways of being, and vice versa (See Matthews 2009). Whereas many social scientific studies tend to focus on significant experiences, such as sacred ritual, in order to examine the production of meaning (See Turner and Bruner 1986), this thesis focuses on ordinary, everyday activity within the context of Cedar River. The activities associated with community-building, interpersonal relationships, organisational viability, human-environmental interaction and food-related practices, in particular, are explored. I argue that daily activities, in the context of intentional community, take on a heightened significance due to the explicitness of value attached to them, thereby rendering them a key medium through which residents of intentional communities experience their lives as meaningful.

Additionally, I argue that daily activities which can be understood as contributing to the communal projects of the pursuits of sustainability and well-being have an even greater impact on residents' ability to experience their lives as meaningful. This is due to the fact that both sustainability and well-being (understood as being intimately connected to one another) are goods which extend beyond the individual and the community. They are referred to as projects because they do not have fixed achievable ends, but rather are goals, set by the community-as-a-whole, that become more accurate in the processes of pursuit (See Levy 2005). Thus, the activities associated with these projects, and similar ones such as the pursuit of world peace, have the power to confer "superlative meaning" on the lives of intentional community residents (ibid).

How selfhood and identity are conceptualised, negotiated and recognised by residents and the community-as-a-whole, through these activities, emerges as a secondary theme throughout the thesis. I suggest that the disjuncture between communal vision and individual experience becomes most apparent in the ongoing processes of goal actualisation.

I conclude by suggesting why it is that intentional community possesses the distinctive socio-cultural qualities of: everyday explicitness of values and support for the pursuit of projects that reach beyond the self. I argue that, ultimately, intentional community is concerned with social change, thereby requiring demonstrability of the specific aspects of their chosen lifestyle which are thought to be beneficial for the ambient society in order that said aspects might be used as a model. Thus, intentional community is worthy of further anthropological enquiry into the social relations, cultural processes and institutional structures that make it what it is. However, due to the idiosyncratic nature of goal fulfilment and meaningful life conferment, it is inherently difficult to assess the overall contribution that intentional community – and Cedar River more specifically - might make towards the pursuit of social progress in the context of the ambient society, thereby calling into question intentional community's viability as a model for development. The move towards the eco-village model of intentional community suggests an attempt to address this issue.

Introduction

> The objective of the anthropological narrative (of whatever scale) is to provide a mode of imagining how individual actions and collective illusions are interlinked, and how they are framed by an implicit sense of a common good.
>
> (Hastrup 2004:469)

The above quote could not be more apt as the first line of a thesis about intentional community and the daily experiences through which lives come to be experienced as meaningful. Indeed, this thesis begins with the question of whether or not intentional community provides a more conducive context for the realisation of meaningful lives than most other contexts in contemporary America. I ask this precisely because individual actions are explicitly tied to beliefs, values and morals (sometimes referred to as ethics) in the intentional community setting so as to provide the means for assessment of progress made towards individual and communal goal attainment. And the pursuit and attainment of personal and communal goals is thought to be a primary avenue through which individuals ascribe meaning to their lives.

Such a question raises a number of issues which must be addressed before moving on to explain the details of the research, such as how it was conducted and who it was conducted among. In particular, some background information on what exactly intentional community is, and how it has previously been understood in the social sciences, will aid in framing the ethnographical material used throughout this thesis. I have, therefore, begun with a substantial overview of intentional community.

Additionally, one might be prompted to ask, "How does one define a life as meaningful?" Clearly, there is no straightforward answer to such a question, and certainly no universal formula that might be applied. Nonetheless, a few useful places to begin thinking about meaningful lives have been suggested by scholars in the fields of philosophy, religious studies, (multi)cultural studies, psychology, sociology and - of course - anthropology. A brief discussion of how I am using this concept in the thesis follows, thereby providing the initial theoretical grounding of my research.

Furthermore, much of my argument centres on the fact that beliefs, values and morals are being actualised on a *daily* basis in intentional communities, which creates the need for an explanation of the conceptual significance of everyday life, and I have therefore included one. Undoubtedly, there are various other such concepts that require some initial clarification, though these have arisen as a result of the findings of my analysis and are therefore discussed after the thesis overview near the end of this Introduction.

What is intentional community?

> An "intentional community" is a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values. The people may live together on a piece of rural land, in a suburban home, or in an urban neighborhood, and they may share a single residence or live in a cluster of dwellings.
>
> This definition spans a wide variety of groups, including (but not limited to) communes, student cooperatives, land co-ops, cohousing groups, monasteries and ashrams, and farming collectives. Although quite diverse in philosophy and lifestyle, each of these groups places a high priority on fostering a sense of community--a feeling of belonging and mutual support that is increasingly hard to find in mainstream Western society.
>
> (Kozeny 1996:1)

This definition, taken from an article entitled "Intentional Communities: Lifestyles Based on Ideals", was written by Geoph Kozeny, a man who is much respected (and generally well-known) by those involved with the promotion of knowledge and skills relating to communal living in the United States. Kozeny spent over thirty years travelling around the United States, visiting all manner of intentional communities. He resided in quite a few different communities for various lengths of time and used his accumulated knowledge and experience to inform members of the general public of their existence. At the time of publication of the aforementioned article, Kozeny was coordinating the communities' database for the Fellowship for Intentional Communities (FIC) – the largest network of intentional communities in North America – as well as serving on the FIC board. I therefore begin my analysis of intentional community with Kozeny's definition, as it seems fair to assume that his is representative of the general conception of intentional community held by those who consider themselves to be part of the wider network of intentional community enthusiasts in the U.S.

Kozeny's (1996), definition of intentional community points us towards two main features of intentional community. The first is that it is comprised of people who have chosen to live together with a *common purpose*, and the second is that these people are working to create a certain *lifestyle* based on shared values with a particular emphasis on 'community'. Since intentional communities often understand themselves as explicit critiques[1] of the society out of which they grow (See Brown 2002), we can assume that Kozeny's definition of intentional community suggests the very manner in which those who participate in intentional community, at least in the United States, understand their lives to be distinct from that of the ambient - or 'mainstream' - society. In other words, Kozeny's definition suggests that members of the 'mainstream' do not choose to live together with a *common purpose*, nor do they come together to create *lifestyles* based on shared values, particularly in the form of 'community'. Thus he is suggesting a contrast in content and form between intentional community and 'mainstream' society. It is, however, entirely possible that Kozeny does not assume such a stark opposition in his definition, but is rather suggesting that it is a matter of degrees (i.e. members of the 'mainstream' have *some* common purpose and shared values, and alternatively intentional community members do not share one hundred percent of values or purpose). Nonetheless, he is suggesting a distinction.

The second of these two suggestions presumably refers to the line of thought which argues that most group forms and activities in present-day American society – whether or not they are referred to as 'community' - appeal only to certain *aspects* of a person's life due to the 'individualised' (Dumont 1985) nature of modern Western selves (See Amit and Rapport 2002). By contrast, in saying that intentional

[1] Intentional community is often thought of as a form of utopianism due to the emphasis placed on critique and societal distinction from those who participate in intentional community. However, while intentional community is certainly a group form and activity that is very much concerned with the notion of an ideal society, I am not convinced that it is helpful to associate intentional community with utopianism. Utopianism "requires 'vivid imagination' of the norms, institutions and individual relationships of a qualitatively better…society than that in which the utopianist lives" (Pepper 2005:4); however, while utopianism can be used in a constructive manner by identifying the potential for social progress based on current social conditions, it can also be used to create fantastical worlds that have no basis in reality. Furthermore, visions of Utopia are often totalising visions, thereby placing emphasis on organisational perfection, potentially to the detriment of individual beings (Davis 1981:38–39). I, therefore, have chosen to dissociate the analysis of intentional community in this thesis from the concept of utopia in order to more clearly highlight the practicality and dynamism inherent in such experiments.

communities are comprised of people who are working together to create a certain *lifestyle* based on common values, one is implying that intentional communities seek to engage "whole persons" (See Redfield 1960) in their communal projects, much like the idealised 'little communities' found in non-Western or pre-industrial Western contexts, the likes of which have traditionally been the focus of much anthropological and sociological attention (See Chapter One for a more in-depth discussion on the meaning of 'community'). For instance, members of a community housing association somewhere in the U.S. may agree that tidy lawns and well-maintained paint jobs are important expressions of their shared values and therefore decide to join communally in enforcing these aesthetic qualities. However, these individuals would not be expected to consult one another about what they might cook for dinner or whether or not they can get a cat. On the other hand, if we consider that one's *lifestyle* - understood as "a way of using certain goods, places and times that is characteristic of a group but is not the totality of their social experience" (Chaney 1996:5) - may encompass beliefs about food choice or treatment of animals, these issues may very well be topics that are up for discussion in an intentional community, particularly if they are seen to impact the ability of others to realise the agreed upon core values and ideals.

The first of Kozeny's suggestions regarding members of the 'mainstream' U.S. society – being that they have not "chosen to live together with a *common purpose*" (emphasis is mine) – seemingly refers us to the meaning of the word 'intentional' in the phrase 'intentional community'. Intentionality, in its commonsense form, refers to "the doing of something on purpose…or according to a plan" (Duranti 2000:134). According to Kozeny's definition, then, intentional community residents have elected to live by a shared *intention* and thus, by extension are distinct from members of 'mainstream' U.S. society who have not chosen a common intention to live by. The distinction assumed in this instance comes from the emphasis placed on living life according to a plan within intentional community, and actively choosing to do so in opposition to the 'mainstream' society. However, this line of thinking appears rather culturally specific and prompts us to ask on what basis Kozeny, or any other intentional community resident, might suggest that

members of the ‘mainstream’ are unintentional. More broadly, we might ask, what precisely is ‘intentional’ referring to in the phrase ‘intentional community’?

The following excerpt was taken from an article published on the official FIC website in which the origin of the phrase ‘intentional community’ is supposedly explained. It is the only discussion of the origin I have been able to discover:

> Amazingly, the term "intentional community" can be traced directly to a point of origin. Al Andersen, President of the Fellowship of Intentional Communities in 1960…wrote this in 1993, as part of a eulogy for Griscom Morgan:
>
> ...in his book, The Small Community...Arthur Morgan explains that he considered the small community to be the "seedbed of society," a seedbed that has been permitted largely to go into decay because of neglect and lack of appreciation for its value....It is clear that both Griscom and his father were not only interested in reviving and energizing "community" in more conventional society, but also in the experimental frontiers represented by the various intentional communities which sprang up during and immediately after World War II, though they were initially called "cooperative communities."
>
> In order to promote interest in (small) community, Arthur Morgan founded Community Service, Inc., in 1940. By the mid-'40s...(he founded) the annual Small Community Conference. It was in the course of working at Community Service that I became aware of... Celo (NC) and other cooperative communities (Macedonia-GA, Bruderhof-NY, Bryn Gweled-PA, Tanguy-PA)....I immediately approached Griscom with the idea of inviting members of these various cooperative communities to a gathering of their own, perhaps immediately following the next Small Community Conference. That must have been about 1948, or possibly 1949...
>
> Individuals did come, from Celo, Macedonia and other groups. Art Wiser from Macedonia (now a leader in the Rifton, NY, Bruderhof Community) showed exceptional interest. So much so that he assumed leadership of the new organization of cooperative communities initiated at that time.
>
> ...the cooperative community movement had...(a pioneering) role in the larger society....It was the role of establishing...a new global society, from the ground up. Accordingly, the new organization was initially called the Inter-Community Exchange. It soon became apparent, however, that the thing that the various cooperative communities had to exchange, and that others needed, was primarily fellowship. Almost simultaneously, the concept of "intentionality" came into play. Thus, the name of these groups was changed from "cooperative communities" to "intentional communities." The combination of these two changes led to the name change to Fellowship of

> Intentional Communities. As far as we know, that is the first appearance of the term.
>
> (Questenberry: http://www.ic.org/pnp/cdir/1995/05quest.php. Last accessed May 21, 2010)

No clear explanation is given here as to why the concept of 'intentionality' became significant, or what, if any, the relationship between it and the concept of 'fellowship' was thought to be. Thus, I am left to make my own suggestions as to what 'intentional' is meant to refer to in the phrase 'intentional community'.

Intentionality is a concept to which a very specific philosophical tradition is attached, predominantly informed in modern academia by Franz Brentano and Edmund Husserl (See for instance Mohanty 1972; Searle 1983; Lyons 1995; Duranti 2000 for more discussion). It is understood to refer to "the property of human consciousness of being directed toward or being about something" (Duranti 2000:134) or, more clearly "the distinguishing property of mental phenomena of being necessarily directed upon an object, whether real or imaginary" (Oxford English Dictionary Online, last accessed 16 June 2010). However, as Duranti (2000) and Lyons (1995) appropriately recognise, "this notion of intentionality should be distinguished from the commonsense notion associated with the doing of something on purpose…or according to a plan" (Duranti 2000:134). It is this second, commonsensical, understanding of intentionality (or 'intention' as I shall hitherto refer to it in order to avoid confusion with the philosophical notion) that I believe intentional community residents have in mind when referring to themselves as such.

What, then, are intentional community residents suggesting is the object of their purpose or plan? Is the object simply 'community'? And if so, does this mean that they are suggesting that all other types of community in a Western - or more specifically, American - context are 'unintentional' (i.e. unplanned or without purpose)? Some intentional community residents have suggested that the intent or purpose refers to "a mutual concern" or "specific communal values and goals" (http://www.ic.org/pnp/cdir/1995/05quest.php, last accessed May 21, 2010). This explanation is extremely vague and could arguably be said to be true for many other types of communities found in 'The West'. Another interpretation was given to me by a resident of Cedar River – the intentional community in which I conducted my

research and which forms the ethnographic basis of this thesis - during an interview I conducted with her.

Maryanne was the longest-term resident of Cedar River during my time there, having been part of the community from its inception. Throughout our many conversations, and particularly during the interview I conducted with her, it had become clear that her upbringing in a close-knit farming community had a great deal of influence over her decision to become part of an intentional community. In fact, Maryanne told me that without that upbringing, she most likely would not have ended up at Cedar River. During our interview, Maryanne described this farming community as "the best of community in an unintentional kind of community way" (Aug. 30, 2007). To elaborate on this point, Maryanne explained to me how she had developed a deep respect for - and belief in – the value of people working together for the good of each other due to her experiences in the farming community, in particular through witnessing a very American Protestant work ethic. However, she went on to say that her experience of living in such a community had also been somewhat negative in the sense that she felt she was constantly under surveillance from other community members, which generally resulted in criticism. Thus, this surveillance was not always in the interest of the person being surveilled, but rather tended to work as a mechanism for maintaining a community based on certain implicit morals. These implicit morals felt somewhat oppressive to Maryanne, as if they somehow left little room for self-discovery, growth or personal choice; and yet, she still recognised the many benefits of 'community', thus she began to research intentional community, designing an imagined community which included details such as organisational structure and decision-making processes.

From this example, I have concluded that Maryanne's understanding of 'intentional' refers to both *explicitness* of morals within the community setting, as well as *planned* in order to take account of the needs and wants of *all* the elements that comprise the community. Thus, intention refers to an ontological state. This conception of 'intentional' or 'intention' was echoed by another Cedar River resident, who explained to me that intentional communities foster a certain "consciousness" which equates to living in such a way so as to be making choices and creating in the world with an awareness of self, rather than just reacting to the

world (Pixie, Interview Aug. 2, 2007). However, Pixie expressed the belief that it was not only within intentional community that one could live in such a way, but that intentional community was a particularly good context for practicing and witnessing such behaviour. Thus, it is fair to say that the word 'intentional' in the phrase 'intentional community' is used as both a mark of distinction from other communities in a 'Western' – or more specifically American – context, as such communities are unlikely to have *planned* out the daily functioning of their community in any great detail; as well as to signify that the residents of intentional communities are actively *choosing* to live their lives in a certain manner[2].

Intentional Community in Social Scientific Thought

Anthropologists and sociologists, as well as other social researchers, are no strangers to intentional community. From the 1950s onwards, a steady interest in intentional community is evident in social research publications (See Conover 1978 and Sutton 2003; 2004). Patrick Conover, an American sociologist defines intentional communities thus:

> Intentional communities share some but not all resources and make only some important expenditures from a common purse. They have formed their community by a mutual choice rather than because of family relationships, to affirm some aspect of ideology or lifestyles.
>
> (Conover 1978:5)

History of Intentional Community in The United States

Much, but certainly not all, of the scholarship on intentional communities has been focussed on the types of intentional communities that proliferated throughout the United States, beginning with the earliest known intentional communities there that date back to the first half of the 17th century. The earliest intentional communities in the United States (then, still an English colony) were organised by religious groups, such as the Shakers or the Amish, who were seeking religious freedom from their European oppressors (See Kanter 1972; Zablocki 1980; Oved 1988; Brown 2002; Sargisson and Sargent 2004). These groups were characterised by their strict

[2] It is worthwhile noting that these two aspects of intentional community – that community life is planned and residents have actively chosen to take part – may indicate some of the reasons why intentional communities have a reputation for being short-lived. When plans are too rigid, there is little room for flexibility in the face of unforeseen circumstances. Additionally, if one has chosen to live according to certain values in opposition to the 'mainstream' society, s/he is just as likely to choose to rejoin the 'mainstream' at some point in the future.

adherence to Christian values, as interpreted from the Bible, and a strong focus on communal participation.

In the first half of the 19th century, a different type of intentional community was appearing in the United States that is often thought of as the 'utopian' or 'socialist' community. These communities, such as Robert Owen's New Harmony, were attempting to create new social and political realities, largely in response to the industrialisation of the country (Hostetler 1974; Brown 2002; Kanter 1972). Intentional communities with socialist and sometimes anarchist ideals continued to spring up throughout the United States well into the 20th century, with a particularly noticeable increase in the creation of intentional communities in the 1960s and 70s. These intentional communities, often referred to as communes, are generally associated with the political upheaval over the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, environmentalism and the rise of feminism, as well as drugs, open sexuality, and new religious movements (Miller 1999).

Some of the intentional communities that exist in the United States today are continuations of the types of intentional community described above; yet there is also a new wave of intentional community that began in the early 1980s (Schehr 1997) which is often linked to 'New Age' ideologies (Berry 1992). This final wave has been described as "more structured manifestations of an alternative lifestyle" (Sutton 2004:132). The current wave of intentional community in the United States is characterised by a desire to be rid of the nine to five work schedule, a growing concern for the environment, an emphasis on personal growth and strong relationships, and a generally middle-class university-educated population (McLaughlin and Davidson 1985).

Furthermore, I would argue that this recent trend in intentional community – both in the U.S. and elsewhere - is closely linked with the conception of the 'eco-village', understood to be a "human-scale, full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future" (Gilman 1991:1). A fair proportion of (relatively) newly formed intentional communities are using the label of 'eco-village' or 'aspiring eco-village' to describe

themselves. One such self-defined intentional community that now describes themselves as being an eco-village is The Findhorn Foundation in Scotland. Findhorn (as it is known) traces its origins to 1962, when its original three settlers arrived and set themselves up in a caravan on the Moray Firth (Sutcliffe 2000). As an intentional community, it has been growing steadily since the 1970s, but as of 1985 "the heart of the largest single intentional community in the UK" was coined an eco-village (http://www.findhorn.org/whatwedo/ecovillage/ecovillagefindhorn.php last accessed 25, May 2010). I argue in Chapter Four and The Conclusion of this thesis that it is perhaps in an attempt to address the overall impact intentional communities are able to have on the ambient society, in terms of shifting societal norms, that the eco-village model has become more prevalent.

I mention Findhorn here as not only is it an example of a well-known intentional community that has chosen to re-issue itself as an eco-village due to the current trends in 'alternative' community-building objectives and nomenclature, but also because Findhorn was a source of inspiration for Cedar River (the intentional community in which I conducted my research) and presumably other intentional communities due to its very public profile. Though Findhorn is much larger than Cedar River, is more hierarchical, and is much more focussed on "'getting in touch with Spirit: the god within'" (Sutcliffe quoting Paul 2000: 220), it deserves recognition as a source of inspiration and knowledge for many Euro-American intentional communities.

Social scientific interest in intentional community has generally been focussed on the factors which both detract from, and contribute to, a 'successful' intentional community (See Sargisson and Sargent 2004; Andelson 2002; Brumann 2001; Oved 1988; Kanter 1972). Success, in this instance, is not easily defined. Longevity appears as a common theme, most popularly addressed by Kanter (1972) in her work on commitment in community. Commitment is seen to be positively correlated with longevity and longevity is seen to indicate success. Longevity as an indicator of success is also used by those social scientists who are focussed on communal survival. Such studies (See Brumann 2000) analyse the ability of a particular community to survive in relation to such variables as secular versus

religious ideologies, inward versus outward looking goals, and charismatic versus non-hierarchical leadership, to name a few.

Success has alternatively been understood through the ability of the intentional community to have a positive impact on its residents or society at large. For instance, Oved (1988) concludes his historical review of 277 American communities by suggesting that many communes did not succeed in changing society, but they did change the lives of those who had resided in them to such a degree that, once reintegrated into the larger society, their activities reflected their experiences in the communes (1988:477). Additionally, Kamau (2002) suggests that in order for a community to succeed, it must be able to create a sense of *communitas* among its members, thereby increasing the likelihood that residents will remain content in their community.

Historically, analysis of intentional community was generally conducted from a structural point-of-view, wherein gender relations, attitudes toward children, and organisational structures, for example, were examined in order to uncover what they might tell us about the benefits and drawbacks of new social forms for both individuals and the larger society (See Kanter 1972; 1973; Abrams and McCulloch 1976; Zablocki 1980). In addition, Sargisson and Sargent (2004) have pointed out that, beyond structural analysis, other scholarship focussed on intentional community has mainly taken the form of either historical genealogies or comparative 'travelogues'.

More recently, however, it has been suggested that the use of universals, such as 'success', when analysing intentional community, should be viewed with caution, as such claims often fail to make explicit the criteria against which the community in question is being judged (See Schehr 1997; Sargisson and Sargent 2004). In particular, these social scientists argue that each community is informed by the political economic situation of the country within which it exists, which inevitability makes for vast differences in the ways socio-cultural processes can be interpreted. Consequently, in their comparative study of intentional communities in New Zealand, Sargisson and Sargent (2004) instead choose to conclude their analysis with a whole list of propositions about the nature of intentional communities, such as the fact that they generally have an inclination toward consensus decision-making or a

tendency to attract a transient population. Schehr (1997), in a similar vein, aims to understand the political, economic, and cultural motivations behind the formation of intentional communities with a view to establishing intentional communities as a social movement.

The discussion above serves to ground us in the current understandings and modes of analysis of intentional community from within academia, and also highlights some important insufficiencies in the analysis of intentional community. Social scientists have certainly acknowledged that 'success' can be understood from various standpoints and, indeed, that success is perhaps not a useful notion at all for understanding the significance of intentional communities. Taking the lead from Oved (1988), I argue that intentional community must be viewed as a context that has the ability to impact the lives of its residents. Thus we must look at what residents of intentional communities *actually do*, daily, in order to find some answers as to why intentional community continues to be significant enough to attract, and sustain, a sizable amount of interest from all types of people. An analysis of everyday life in intentional community, with a view to understanding the significance of daily activities in the lives of residents, therefore, is what this thesis intends to contribute to the social scientific knowledge on intentional community.

What About the 'Mainstream'

Intentional community residents (Cedar River residents included) have chosen to remove themselves, to whatever degree, from their ambient society due to a perceived disjuncture between their own beliefs, values and morals and those which are considered the norm of the ambient society. At Cedar River, this disjuncture was generally understood as 'Cedar River versus the 'mainstream''. While there are quite a few references throughout the thesis to 'mainstream' society, some of which help to illuminate what specific residents meant by the term 'mainstream', I feel it is useful to give a brief explanation. Mainstream is used in an empirical sense "to convey the broad social world of urban-industrial Western society" (Riches and Prince 2000: viii). However, it is also used in a dialogical sense as a catch-all term for representing various elements of the lifestyle - such as the capitalistic and individualistic tendencies which are stereotypical of contemporary American society - that Cedar River residents were actively opposing and attempting to refashion. In

other words, ‘mainstream’ was used by Cedar River residents to symbolise ‘the other’ in a whole host of oppositions, such as counter- or sub- vs. mass culture, minority vs. majority views and conscious vs. unconscious lifestyles. Thus, ‘mainstream’, in the context of this thesis, essentially refers to a critical impression of the normative social world of urban-industrialised Americans.

It should be noted that it has been my project in this thesis to comment on both Cedar River views of ‘mainstream’ society and ‘mainstream’ society in comparison to Cedar River, rather than attempting to describe ‘mainstream’ views of Cedar River residents or ‘mainstream’ society in objective terms. This is simply because it would have been impossible to get the opinions of a representative sample of ‘mainstream’ folks without doing an in-depth study of what defines the ‘mainstream’, something that was neither my intention nor a possibility within the constraints of my research. With this in mind, it is important that I make clear precisely what is being suggested by the statement: intentional communities are experienced by their residents as more conductive for the realisation of meaningful lives than ‘mainstream’ contexts in contemporary America. I am not suggesting that ‘mainstreamers’ lives’ are less meaningful than those of intentional community residents. Nor am I suggesting that intentional community is the only context in which life might be experienced as meaningful for residents and non-residents alike. Rather, I am suggesting that “some cultures, or institutions, beliefs and practices, are better than others at allowing people to achieve well-being and to achieve meaningful lives” (Thin 2009:25), and seeing as intentional community is a distinctive socio-cultural context in which social change is the overarching goal, the level of self-reflectivity inherent in the processes associated with goal achievement leads to the *experience* of living a meaningful life. I elaborate on these processes further in the next section, entitled ‘How Do We Define Meaningful Lives’, and even more so throughout the thesis, but before moving onto more detailed explanations, I will introduce my point with an ethnographic example of a Cedar River resident who left the community shortly after my own departure.

Arthur, a Cedar River member in his late forties/early fifties, had been residing in the community for just over a year at the time of my arrival. One year on, when I conducted a face-to-face interview with him, he had been a Cedar River for

two full years and had some revealing insights to share with me regarding his experience of his life in relation to being resident at Cedar River. Arthur explained to me how he initially thought of his move to Cedar River (and intentional community more generally) as an experiment. Not only did Arthur want to experiment with the alternative social forms – such as consensus decision-making and self-governance – that he had read about, but he was also wanting to "de-compartmentalise" or "integrate" his life so as to experience a seamless continuity between his daily work activities and the rest of the activities he found fulfilling. Cedar River appeared like the perfect place to do so as its mission was aligned with Arthur's personal values and goals, and thus he felt that the skills he had developed as part of the 'mainstream' society – although no longer able to contribute to his experience of living a meaningful life in that context - would be well worth utilising towards the good of the community.

For two years, Arthur took part in all aspects of community life, working particularly hard in his role as the organisational coordinator for the non-profit. Although Arthur described his experience as consuming, he also expressed that he had experienced the benefits of such a lifestyle and that it would be very difficult to go back to the 'mainstream'. He added that he experienced what he was - and had - been doing with his life at Cedar River as absolutely the right thing for him at that point; but that did not preclude some other opportunity for pursuing a meaningful life from presenting itself at some other point in time. In fact, throughout the course of our interview, Arthur explained to me how he had recently begun seeing his life at Cedar River as an experiment once again. In other words, after his arrival, for the two years leading up to our interview, Arthur had forgotten about the experiment and was whole-heartedly invested in his life at Cedar River, understanding his daily activities as contributing to his experience of a meaningful life; but recently, he had begun to feel sceptical as to whether or not Cedar River was capable of achieving the goals they had set out to achieve. He was beginning to feel that he could no longer receive the support he needed for living an "integrated" life at Cedar River.

Approximately six months after this interview, Arthur moved from Cedar River, eventually coming to purchase a small property not too far from Cedar River. His intention was to have a secure place to live, grow some food and form long-term

relationships with the surrounding community which had recently been identified by a national survey as a prime location according to various quality of life indicators. In a personal letter to myself and a few others, Arthur described his decision as choosing "a more mainstream form of what I had sought at [Cedar River]". In other words, Arthur was seeking a more 'mainstream' (less alternative and isolated in terms of various socio-cultural processes) version of the experience of living a meaningful life. Thus we can see that Arthur's decision to leave Cedar River and rejoin the 'mainstream', due to multiple factors, but certainly a level of disenchantment with the community's ability to achieve their stated goals, was framed in much the same way as his decision to become part of Cedar River – as a search for, or experiment in, experiencing a more meaningful life. For two years, living at Cedar River fulfilled this criterion for Arthur, but when it no longer did due to the identification of a disjuncture with his own goals and those of which Cedar River was seemingly capable of achieving, Arthur moved in order to pursue (and presumably experience) a meaningful life elsewhere.

How Do We Define Meaningful Lives?

The academic search for what constitutes a meaningful life dates back at least as far as ancient Greece, and is evidenced in the writing of Plato (Apology 39A) with Socrates' claim that the unexamined life in not worth living (cited in Sarot 1996:1). Subsequently, there have been countless religious, philosophical, psychological, sociological and anthropological contributions to the existential dilemma of how we might come to define a life as meaningful.

The idea of leading meaningful lives has become a central theme in this thesis because I sought a way to frame the general desire people have for moving into, and living in, intentional communities. As I have just discussed, people move into intentional communities both because they feel some aspects of their ambient society do not correspond with their own ideals, and in order to better realise their beliefs, values and morals on a daily basis. This second point was expressed to me quite succinctly by one resident who said, "Living at [Cedar River] makes it easier to realise values" (Frank, Interview, Aug. 31, 2007). More to the point, both of these motivations point towards the search for meaning.

It is nothing new to suggest that modernity has resulted in grand shifts in the ways in which we understand ourselves and our lives in the industrialised West. Many a scholar has theorised about what these shifts mean for their contemporaries and future generations. One analysis that is remarkably pertinent to my own work can be found in the work of Paul Heelas (See 2008 in particular). In *Spiritualities of Life*, Heelas sets out to discover the capacities that 'New Age spiritualities of life' possess to make a positive impact on life. He defines these "humanistic, egalitarian" (2008:5) 'spiritualities of life' as practices and teachings that emphasize "delving within oneself to experience the primary source of the sacred" (p.5). Heelas grounds his search for the significance of these spiritualities in the view that the "'human' aspects of life – time to ponder, the opportunity to *be* oneself, the possibility of living as a free spirit" are under threat in the contemporary West (p.2, emphasis in original). He suggests, therefore, that the emergence and proliferation in Western nations of these spiritualities of life, informed as they are by humanistic values, are a response to "capitalist modernity" and "regulatory imperialism" (p.219).

In other words, Heelas (2008) is suggesting that, by cultivating expressivistic and humanistic values, spiritualities of life allow individuals to have meaningful experiences which result in an improvement in their quality of life (and the quality of the lives of those around them). He is, therefore, linking the notion of meaningful lives to the realisation of values. Robinson (2007) makes a similar claim in regard to what gives life meaning. He states that "lives are meaningful when they are characterised by the pursuit of subjectively significant purposes. The significance of purposes, in turn, is defined by reference to contexts of value secured outside of the self" (2007:47). Robinson is seeking to establish the importance of objective meaningfulness when he says 'contexts of value secured outside of the self', in the sense that meaning sustaining values are ones that are justifiable independent of the self (p.42). From his particular point of view, which is aimed at informing multicultural policy, communities provide the ideal 'context of value', and thus communities are crucial for the realisation of meaningful lives.

While Robinson's (2007) argument is certainly useful for establishing the importance of community in allowing individuals to experience their lives as meaningful, he does fail to recognise that other, personally rewarding, activities

might also confer meaning on the life of an individual. Levy (2005) seeks to address this issue in his article on downshifters by identifying different types, or levels, of meaning that might be experienced. According to Levy, "downshifters seek more meaningful lives by decreasing the amount of time they devote to work, leaving more time for the valuable goods of friendship, family and personal development" (2005:176). However, Levy argues that downshifters do not quite achieve their goals due to the fact that it is through work – a specific type of work – that *superlative* meaning is achieved.

Thus, Levy claims that downshifters are indeed experiencing their lives as meaningful, but not to the extent that they might be if they were "devoted to (the promotion of) goods beyond the self" (2005:179). A life devoted to pursuing goods beyond the self, Levy explains, is one engaged in "projects", being activities in which "supremely valuable goods are at stake" (2005:185) and, in the course of pursuit, "the goal is gradually defined and more precisely specified" (2005:184-185). Therefore, in essence, Levy is arguing for the acknowledgement of two levels of meaning which might be applied to an individual's life: that of ordinary meaning which is achieved through the pursuit of goods deemed as valuable or worthwhile by the individual and that of superlative meaning which is achieved through work on projects, such as the pursuit of justice, which are deemed as highly valuable common goods.

One additional viewpoint on meaningful lives provides a more philosophical bent to the analysis in this thesis. Pihlström (2007) questions whether or not lives can be viewed as meaningful in the face of meaningless evil. He suggests that there are two ways in which one might pursue meaning - through 'the life of action' or 'the life of contemplation' – and then proceeds to speculate as to what each type of pursuit entails in relation to viewing life as meaningful. In regards to the life of action, Pihlström notes that agents are "first and foremost ethical beings", resulting in the moral philosophy that "the world ought to be made better, and life more meaningful, by acting in it" (2007:7). Therefore, meaning is derived from the relative progress, or lack thereof, one makes towards making the world better, in whatever ways one chooses to do so.

The overriding theme in all of these musings on meaningful lives is that of the role of values and morals. To that I would add beliefs. I shall take a moment here to specify what I mean by each of these terms, as they feature heavily throughout the thesis:

- Beliefs are those things which are held as true
- Values provide the measure of importance placed on things in life
- Morals (sometimes referred to as ethics) pertain to those things which are held to be right or wrong, good or bad, and are generally chosen codes of conduct to live by

Each writer whom I summarised above suggests, in their own way, that living according to those things which we hold to be true and right leads us towards meaningful lives.

Additionally, following on from Robinson's (2007) suggestion, I aim in this thesis to make explicit that certain contexts are experienced as more conducive to the realisation of life as meaningful than others. However, my argument is unique in that it pertains to intentional communities. I am suggesting that intentional communities are *experienced* as contexts that are conducive for the realisation of meaningful lives because they are contexts in which residents are encouraged and enabled to:

- live according to explicit beliefs, values and morals
- and pursue goods that extend beyond the self in an assessable manner in order that progress might be recognized

Thus, following on from Levy (2005), intentional communities not only provide residents with a context that allows for the realisation of personal and communal goals, but also promotes the pursuit of supremely valuable goods, such as sustainability and well-being, through daily activity.

Of course, the above criteria are not the *only* criteria for establishing how one might come to experience his/her life as meaningful. However, the above criteria, as I aim to demonstrate throughout the thesis, seemingly explains why it is the Cedar River residents - and intentional community residents more generally - tend to experience their own lives as more meaningful in the context of intentional community, in comparison to 'mainstream' contexts.

Beliefs, Values and Morals

Recently, anthropologists have begun to more directly address the issue of morality and ethics. Prior to the current resurgence in interest, a rather Durkheimian view of morality pervaded the discipline of anthropology, with social life being equated to morality (Robbins 2007). However, a variety of anthropologists (See Howell 1997; Laidlaw 2002; Widlok 2004; Robbins 2007; Sykes 2009; Zigon 2007, 2009) have now begun to question this assumption, laying the groundwork for some debate over the ways in which morality and/or ethics actually operate within a given society.

A major strand of this debate is centred on the role of choice. Laidlaw (2002) has argued that moral/ethical behaviour can be located in an individual's attempts at fashioning him/herself into a particular type of person, as s/he has freely chosen to become that person based upon self-reflection in relation to certain values, institutions, practices or ideals. Similarly, Howell (1997) suggests that moralities can be studied by focussing on individual's processes of moral reasoning, wherein options are being considered and choices to act in certain ways must be made. Widlok (2004), on the other hand, locates morality in the dispositions that arise through customary practices, thereby suggesting that morality does not hinge on choice, but rather results from an unconscious state. Finally, Robbins (2007) and Zigon (2007, 2009) both argue that there exists a moral/ethical dimension in both unconscious and conscious acts, though they formulate two different arguments as to how the distinction between the two types of act might be conceived.

Robbins (2007) suggests that we must understand cultural life as consisting of different value spheres from which individuals draw morality. Normally, this is an unconscious process; however in times of value conflict, individuals become aware of their moral stances and are forced to make a choice. Robbins calls these two types of morality the morality of reproduction and the morality of freedom and choice, respectively, suggesting that conscious moments of morality of freedom and choice occur rarely and usually in times of societal disruption. Zigon (2007, 2009) builds on Robbins argument, however he suggests that morality is derived from societal institutions, public discourse and embodied dispositions, rather than value spheres, and thus moralities are not bounded to specific contexts but have global influence. Individuals unconsciously draw from these various moral influences and act

unreflectively until they encounter a moment of "moral breakdown" wherein the individual is forced to consider his/her moral conceptions or dispositions. In moments of "moral breakdown", an individual performs ethics – a process of "stepping away" and "problematization" – in order to "intentionally [work] oneself back into unconscious morality" (2009: 263). Therefore, similar to Robbins' (2007) formulation, Zigon (2007, 2009) suggests a morality of unconscious reproduction and a morality of conscious freedom and choice, yet unlike Robbins (2007), Zigon is arguing that ethics (equated to Robbins' morality of freedom and choice) are performed regularly as part of social life.

This debate becomes useful in relation to the present thesis for two reasons. First, I am arguing that intentional community is a distinctive socio-cultural context in which beliefs, values and morals are explicitly tied to everyday activities, thereby rendering intentional communities contexts which are experienced as more conducive for the realisation of meaningful live than 'mainstream' contexts. Considered in light of this debate, I am suggesting that, because intentional community is defined by the fact that individuals have chosen to live in a particular manner, and everyday activities are designed so as to demonstrate the distinction of that manner, intentional community residents are set up to exist in a state of "moral breakdown" until the ideals and goals of the community have been reached, at which time new institutions, discourses and dispositions will have been created from which to derive unconscious morality. Thus, the continual state of "moral breakdown", which I locate through attention to everyday activities which have been identified by residents as objects of intention (and are thus the object of moral reasoning), causes intentional community residents to be ever aware of their beliefs, values and morals and how they are being addressed and enacted, leading to the experience of a more meaningful life.

Second, this debate highlights the fact that morality can be enacted unintentionally, which therefore forces us to ask if life is only experienced as meaningful when it is the object of reflection. This second point is actually a point of tension that becomes more and more evident throughout the thesis as it refers to the underlying struggle of my informants and ultimately provides a partial

explanation for my theoretical approach to the research, as I expand on in the following section.

Everyday Lives – A Theoretical Approach

Central to my argument is the concept of 'everyday life'. I argue that daily activities, in the context of intentional community, take on a heightened significance due to the explicitness of value attached to them, thereby rendering them a key medium through which residents of intentional communities *experience* their lives as meaningful.

This argument is clearly influenced by both the Geertzian and Turnerian traditions of 'symbolic anthropology' because I am claiming that public symbols (i.e. daily activities) embody cultural meanings which are able to be interpreted by myself and Cedar River residents alike, while also attempting to explain how these symbols actively work to create transformation as part of the social process (See Ortner 1984 for more discussion. Also Geertz 1973 and Turner 1969; 1986). Additionally, my argument is influenced by the anthropological and sociological traditions (of which Geertz and Turner can be considered a part) which explore 'practice' (See Ortner 1984 for more discussion). Of course, practice, particularly as it is understood by Bourdieu (1977), is concerned with both intentional and unintentional action. This presents a very particular tension in the intentional community context, as my argument hinges on residents' experiences of daily activities, which presumes intention and self-reflectivity, but also includes immediate feelings which have yet to be conceptualised. I take up this tension in the Conclusion of this thesis. Overall, however, my theoretical approach can be said to be an interpretive one, centred on everyday activities, which seeks to explain how human action is related to the experience of living a meaningful life.

To analyse a group of people from the perspective of everyday life, is to focus one's analysis on a particular level of social practice, being that of the ordinary (Lefebvre 1991:31). This sits in contrast to analyses which are focussed on particular events that are classed as significant, such as sacred ceremonies or rituals (See discussion on Turner and Bruner 1986 below). It also sits in contrast to much social science, and anthropology more specifically, which tends to be "far more interested in pathologies and oddities than in normality" (Thin 2009:24). Moreover, analyses of everyday lives and activities have the potential to speak more accurately

from the perspective of the local or indigenous population (Overing and Passes 2000: 7). According to Bruner (1986), analyses of everyday lives and activities - made possible through cultural expressions - allows us to interpret others as they interpret themselves.

Additionally, a focus on everyday lives acknowledges the temporal nature of experience (Jenkins 1994: 451). This is of particular importance in intentional community for a couple of reasons. First, intentional communities tend to be dynamic places due to the transient nature of their inhabitants. Thus, a focus on everyday activity can take account of the major shifts in residents and their priorities. This is noteworthy for this thesis, as I aim to emphasise that the ethnographic details used throughout are time and people specific, and therefore may not reflect the current residential make-up. Second, and perhaps more importantly, intentional communities are often envisioned as long-term experiments, wherein the day-to-day activities contribute to the larger goals of the community. At Cedar River, the long-term project of the community was understood as the pursuit of sustainability with a strong emphasis on well-being. In Chapters Six and Seven of this thesis, I argue that everyday activities that are understood as contributing to the pursuit of these longer-term goals work to give a greater sense of meaning to lives of residents, as the goods to which these activities are contributing go beyond the self and seek to address humanity. Thus, focussing on everyday activities, in relation to long-term goals such as sustainability which places future generations into the frame of reference, makes explicit the temporal dimension of ordinary experience.

In his chapter included in the edited volume entitled *The Anthropology of Experience*, Victor Turner explains the distinction made by Dilthey (a German thinker who inspired much of Turner's work on experience) between mere 'experience' and 'an experience'. "Mere experience", explains Turner, "is simply the passive endurance and acceptance of events" (1986:35). *An* experience, on the other hand, "stands out from the evenness of passing hours and years and forms…a 'structure of experience'. [I]t does not have an *arbitrary* beginning and ending…but has...'an initiation and a consummation'" (ibid: 35, emphasis in original). Further, *an* experience can be transformed into an (cultural) 'expression' as it can be objectified (p.5). According to Abrahams (1986:50), it is in the connection between

everyday experience (mere experience), and certain significant experience (*an* experience), that we come to develop meaning in our lives. Thus, it is in the relation between the ordinary activities we participate in and the celebratory and ritual expressions, that we find the organising and meaning-making conventions of a group of people.

I argue, however, that in the context of intentional community, everyday activity is more likely to be thought of as part of *an* experience. Due to the bounded or 'set apart' nature of intentional community, residing in an intentional community is itself understood as *an* experience by its residents (except, perhaps, for those who were born and raised in the community, which I am not qualified to make comment on as there were no such residents present at Cedar River). A person moves into the community at a definitive moment and while resident there, considers him/herself part of an alternative social reality. Nonetheless, residing entails partaking in some or all of the everyday activities of the community. Thus, the mere experience of weeding the garden or preparing communal meals becomes part of the overall experience of intentional community (as I shall argue more fully in Chapter One). The experience of intentional community continues until the definitive moment when a person chooses to leave, at which point he/she also no longer participates in the daily activities of the community and the experience, as such, ends.

Furthermore, these daily activities become the vehicles through which life is experienced as meaningful. Similar to Abrahams' (1986) suggestion that meaning is found in the connections between mere experience and significant experiences, I am suggesting that meaning is found in the connection between daily activities and the overall way of life being chosen by intentional community residents. This is a temporal argument. Bruner (1986:8) highlights the emphasis Dilthey placed on the temporal nature of life in his analysis of experience. According to Bruner's interpretation of Dilthey, experiences in the present are connected to the past and the future through the meanings (and feelings, Abrahams would add) attributed to those experiences. In other words, "[c]ultural change, cultural continuity, and cultural transmission all occur simultaneously in the experiences and expressions of social life" (Bruner 1986:12). Therefore, garden weeding or communal food preparation, informed as they are by individual and communal beliefs, values and morals, are

linked to the progression of events which comprise one's life through the significance attached to these activities. The social significance of these activities is heightened in the context of intentional community, and thus it is that a resident of Cedar River could say "I feel like my time and the things that I do [here] are really…it seems like…I feel useful. I feel really useful" (Ted, Interview, Aug. 11, 2007).

Moreover, the focus on everyday life also makes explicit the role that I, as anthropologist and participant observer, took on within the community. Jenkins (1994) has suggested that anthropologists are particularly well suited to gaining knowledge of the everyday due to their distinct method of research, namely participant observation. As fieldworkers, anthropologists often participate in the daily lives of their research participants, slowly gathering the information they need to understand local meanings. However, as is revealed through participation in a range of daily activities, the socio-cultural knowledge that informs everyday life is not a uniform perspective or set of rules; it is rather a series of experiences and interactions that are collectively negotiated and interpreted, much like the knowledge anthropologists seek to produce as a result of fieldwork (Jenkins 1994: 445). Hence, in choosing to focus on the everyday lives of intentional community residents, I was signing myself up for twelve of months of participating in every possible facet of community life in order to learn through the practices and experiences that one encounters as part of the everyday - in a similar fashion to that of any other resident - leading to a theoretical approach that is both interpretive and centred on human activity.

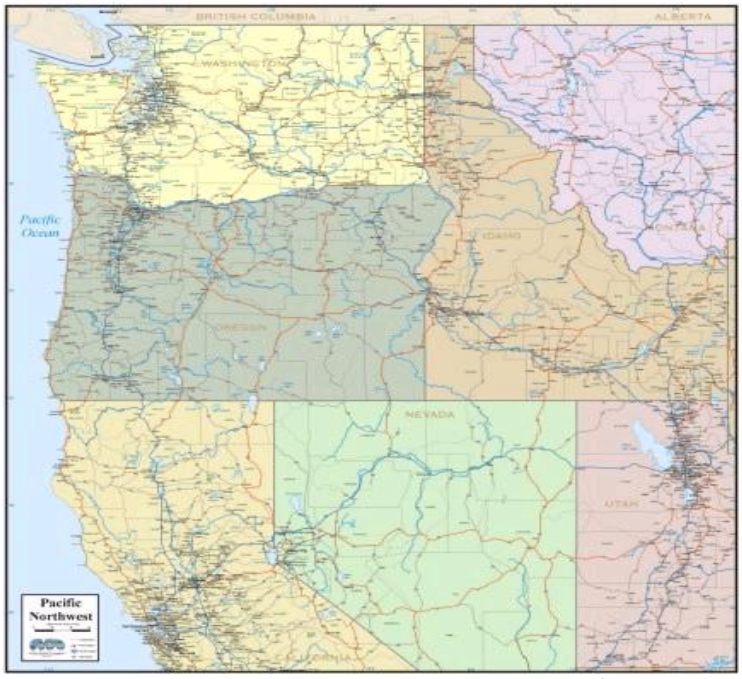
The Field Site

Note: The name of the intentional community within which I conducted my fieldwork has been changed in order to protect the reputation and identity of their organisation.

The intentional community of Cedar River is located in the Cascadian foothills of the Pacific Northwest region (See Map 1) of the continental United States. It is a rural community, somewhat hidden and tucked away in a neighbourhood of mostly logging families, approximately twenty miles outside of a fairly large city. Officially, Cedar River is a registered non-profit educational centre incorporated by

the state under a mission statement. In general terms, the mission states that the organisation seeks to educate the public in areas of social and ecological sustainability while working to sustain an intentional community which acts as an on-site demonstration of experimentation with the concept of sustainability. At the time of my fieldwork (September 2006 – November 2007), Cedar River had been working towards their mission for nearly twenty years.

Map1: Pacific Northwest Continental United States



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(Nevada and Utah are not considered Pacific Northwest states)

The social history of Cedar River was relayed to me multiple times, predominately in verbal form, by the only remaining co-founder still resident within the community. Cedar River was borne out of a convergence of a small group of people in the San Francisco Bay area who were interested in the idea of creating a Land Trust that would hold various urban and rural lands in the area. The site on which Cedar River was later created was soon discovered, and the two people who would later become the co-founding members of Cedar River quickly began researching the possibility of obtaining the property. It turned out that the site had previously been owned by an organisation which had been forced to give it up due to legal difficulties and, thus, while the property contained approximately 25 buildings,

many of these, along with the land itself, had fallen into disuse. Therefore, when the property was finally bought by the two co-founders (the other members of the original small group dropped out in the end), it was it need of serious infrastructural rehabilitation – a process which was ongoing even up to the time of my fieldwork.

The two co-founders (both of whom I believe were in their early forties at the time), along with a small group of other people, moved onto the property with the intention of creating a non-profit conference facility, a nourishing and effective communal group, and a place where people would continually learn and educate others in the area of sustainability. According to Maryanne - the only remaining co-founder living on the property during my time of fieldwork - the first few years were a struggle both financially and interpersonally. During this difficult time, the other co-founder decided that he was unable to live at Cedar River. He did, however, remain involved with the community from afar, even up until the time of my fieldwork, for both personal and financial reasons. Nonetheless, after the first few years, with the organisational structure having been dictated by the incorporation as a non-profit (see Chapter Three for more detail), various processes and ways of being developed, many of which continued, in various forms, to be practiced at the time of my residence (I expand on these processes and ways of being throughout the thesis). Quite a few people had come and gone over the years and with these people new ideas arrived; but the original intention of the community remained fairly unchanged.

The property itself covers close to 90 acres, most of which is old growth forest or regenerating forest land. The main centre of activity is in a wooded area, interspersed with open grass, and contains office buildings, classrooms, cabins, a multi-occupant housing complex, and a communal kitchen/dining area. Besides the wooded area where the majority of 'rustic' dwellings are located, Cedar River boasts a large meadow, a sizeable river, and various cultivated areas. An abundance of flora and fauna shared the land with its human residents, making Cedar River a place of much natural beauty.

Cedar River is by no means an "off-the-grid" community, as the residents made daily use of electric and gas powered appliances, flush toilets and municipal waste disposal facilities. However, alternatives were present, and these were used in conjunction with the more 'mainstream' technologies. Communal and individual

composting toilets were available for use, solar panels were used in the summer months to heat water and provide energy, and all food scraps were composted or fed to chickens. Thus, to someone unfamiliar with the vast range of 'appropriate technologies', Cedar River appeared to be environmentally conscious; yet, from the perspective of one who is immersed in the knowledge of ecological design, Cedar River still had a long way to go in their pursuit of ecological sustainability.

As for the economic organisation of Cedar River, the main source of income on which the community depended came from hosting guests through the community-run conference facilities. Broadly speaking, the conference facilities worked in two ways: they were used by outside organisations as a venue for conducting day, multiple day and week-long events that were somehow aligned with the mission statement of Cedar River and they were also used to host day, multiple day, week-long and month-long events organised by the community-run educational centre at Cedar River. Therefore, the vast majority of Cedar River members (who are distinct from residents, as is explained below) worked to support either the conference facilities or the educational aspects of the non-profit. Staff of the non-profit generally earned the minimum wage required by the state, with some staff earning more due to longer service, performance bonuses and the like. Those few that did not work for the non-profit either earned money off-site or had an independent source of income.

All members were required to pay a rental fee and food fee each month to the community, as well as a one time payment to the community fund upon acceptance as a member. This money was used to pay off community-incurred bills (i.e. facilities, supplies, etc.), as well as the loans which were used to purchase and rejuvenate the property. Any profit made from the educational and conference activities, after salaries were paid, was put directly back into maintaining and improving the communal infrastructure. Additionally, private benefactors donated money for various projects which helped to keep Cedar River afloat financially. Those residents who contributed to the community financially, but were not members, were either interns for the non-profit - who worked in an established position in exchange for room and board; renters – who paid the same fees as members for housing and food; work-traders – who worked on a short-term basis in

exchange for room and board (sometimes paying an additional fee depending on the amount of work completed); or visitors – who paid for room, board and, if there to attend an event, any conference fees associated with the event.

While there have been noticeable shifts in the size of the community at Cedar River over the years of its existence, it was generally held to be true that the size of the community peaked during the time of my residence. At this time, the community averaged fifty residents practically year round, although in the dead of winter, there were a few less, and in the height of summer, there were closer to eighty (due to permaculture and eco-village course participants). The age of community residents ranged from less than two to sixty-two, with a noticeable cluster of residents in their early twenties and another cluster of those whose age fell somewhere between the mid-thirties and fifty. Incredibly, the adult gender balance was approximately 1:1 for the entirety of my stay, despite the numerous comings and goings. As for children, between nine and twelve children - ranging in age from less than two years to fifteen years - were resident during my fieldwork. Eight out of the twelve children had a sibling on the property, meaning that a very small proportion of residents actually had children of their own. Additionally, as mentioned above, only one of the original two co-founders remained in residence, though the other was still involved with Cedar River to a certain degree.

Cedar River was most certainly a community made up of people who were of a white European ancestry, even though, according to their official mission statement, they were open to diversity. At the time of my fieldwork, only one person (maybe two) living on the property could be described as something other than 'white'. Cedar River was also predominantly a community of people who came from a middle-class background, meaning many were University educated and had the financial means to consume commodities without concern for basic survival. The middle-class origin of the vast majority of residents highlights the fact that Cedar River residents were making a *choice* to live simply and with alternative energy sources. They were not doing so out of absolute necessity, but rather for reasons related to the beliefs, values and morals they held. Furthermore, it confirms much of the sociological research on intentional community which suggests that it is a middle-class phenomenon.

There were multiple ways of being resident at Cedar River, each of which carried different levels of responsibility and privilege. The main core of residents were known as community '**members**' (and members' children). These were the folks who, having taken part in the membership process, were accepted by fellow community members and chose to make Cedar River their home. Community members were the only folks who enjoyed full decision-making powers (and only after they had been through the entire membership process which lasted approximately fifteen months) and were also the only folks considered eligible for paid work with the non-profit educational centre. Community members were the largest population of human beings on site, followed closely by the interns.

Interns were hired on a temporary basis – generally for six or nine months – to perform a specific role within the non-profit organisation. As the non-profit encompassed the intentional community, some intern positions, such as the childcare position, were wholly community focussed. Generally, interns came to Cedar River to learn more about a particular area, such as organic farming or vegetarian cooking, but they also came to take part in intentional community life. Therefore, they were expected to perform the same community-related tasks, such as weekly work parties, as community members. Nonetheless, interns were not given the power to make decisions in community-wide meetings.

Due to the fact that Cedar River ran an educational centre, **students** of the centre often formed another level of residents. The courses offered at Cedar River were generally multiple day - and sometimes multiple week - courses, meaning that students formed a visible presence within the community. Depending on the course, students might be asked to participate in daily community tasks, such as cooking and cleaning, however, essentially they were considered paying guests of the centre and were only responsible for following the guidelines of permissible conduct while on Cedar River land.

Finally, there were a small amount of other folks living on the land at any given time. '**Renters**' were folks who had been accepted by the community membership to occupy empty living spaces for a definable period of time. They paid for their living spaces, as well as their share of the community fees which covered the costs of utilities, general upkeep and communal food, and were expected to take

part in communal tasks, such as cooking and cleaning. Otherwise, renters were free to participate as much or as little as they desired in the daily life of the community, though they had no decision-making powers and were not welcome at certain member-only meetings. '**Work-traders**' worked a designated number of hours in exchange for room and board, and were otherwise there to experience community life for a short period of time. And '**Guests**', as the name might suggest, were guests of individuals living at Cedar River.

Certain residents feature more than others throughout the thesis; therefore I have chosen to include a brief overview of these residents in Table 1. The names I have given my informants, however, do not reflect reality. Some residents feature more than others, and a few are described in greater detail, particularly if the staff role inhabited by the resident during the time of my fieldwork was of special importance to my analysis. I have restricted Table 1 to residential status, which gives some indication of each resident's length of stay at Cedar River, in order to demonstrate the range of perspectives that I draw upon for analysis, without making the residents unnecessarily identifiable by those close to the research.

Table 1: Residents and Their Status

Resident's Name	**Residential Status** (Short – became member during my stay; Medium – up to five yrs; Long – over 5 yrs)
Maryanne	Longest-term Community Member (Community Co-founder)
Roger	Long-term Community Member
Ted	Long-term Community Member
Alex	Medium-term Community Member
Dan	Medium-term Community Member
Darius	Medium-term Community Member
Jim	Medium-term Community Member
Arthur	Short-term community Member
Burke	Short-term Community Member
Cedric	Short-term Community Member
Eldin	Short-term Community Member
Kate	Short-term Community Member
Mary	Short-term Community Member
Frank	Infrastructure and Maintenance Intern
Nicole	Educational Services Intern
Pixie	Childcare Intern
Travis	Land and Garden Intern

A Brief Note on Language

There was a distinct use of language among residents, and some affiliates, of Cedar River. Certain words and phrases were heard daily in meetings, one-on-one conversations and group discussions that would strike the unsuspecting observer as unique and somewhat foreign. The words and phrases I am referring to are common enough in the (American) English language and therefore most members of the English-speaking public would have a vague idea as to what the words were signifying. However, it was the particular use, and frequency of use, to which the words and phrases were being put that made them stand out.

One resident explained to me that he thought the language used at Cedar River was derived from analytic philosophy. He saw its use as an attempt to rename "old" ideas in order to make concepts new and exciting. He also added that he felt frustrated by this use of language at times because he thought it denied "basic humanness". Some examples include:

Resonate – To agree with; to feel similarly about

Being present – To be aware of oneself, including both bodily and mental sensations

Having an 'idea' – Used when one wishes to refer to one's thoughts about a given situation, but does not wish to insinuate that those thoughts are necessarily correct or the only possible thoughts

Being curious – An encouraged way of being about oneself and others

Sharing my truth – A way to refer to the expression of one's thoughts that are believed to be true

Creating a container – Creating a safe and supportive environment

Focus on your breath – A common phrase used to remind individuals, or a group, to relax, breathe deeply and become aware of their thoughts and bodily sensations

Consciousness – Used to refer to a certain awareness of the world wherein individuals are more attuned to their own physical, mental and spiritual processes, as well as the processes taking place in their environments, and the relationship between these; The state of awareness wherein one is actively choosing to invest oneself in the positive evolution of humanity

Having an attachment – Used in a somewhat negative manner to describe one's inability to let go of a particular object, issue or way of being

I came to discover that the use of these words and phrases was both a conscious and unconscious action on the part of community residents to aid them in being seen as a group of people with shared goals and similar beliefs, values and morals. Many of the words and phrases I refer to are common among New Age-type communities and are indeed derived from both philosophical and psychological traditions.

I say it was a conscious decision because, when asked by myself if residents noticed a distinct use of language within the community, almost every person was able to identify words that fell into my list of Cedar River vocabulary. Furthermore, many of these words came into common usage by way of the personal growth program that was held on-site, meaning that they were consciously chosen as words that would promote the values and ideals that Cedar River residents held to be their own. Unconsciously, however, unsuspecting visitors and anthropologists were apt to begin using the terminology without thinking about it, much as once picks up the colloquialisms in a given region by the very act of speaking with those that inhabit the region.

Methodology and Positioning in the Field

My arrival at Cedar River was scheduled - quite loosely - with Maryanne, the woman who had answered my initial e-mail in which I enquired about the prospect of doing anthropological research within the intentional community of Cedar River. Maryanne, it turned out, was the co-founder of Cedar River and, during that period of time, was also acting as the visitor coordinator. I had explained in the initial e-mail that I was interested in exploring the socio-cultural processes that are witnessed within 'sustainable[3] living projects', and Cedar River - being an intentional community committed to sustainability on multiple levels - looked like a perfect candidate for my research site. I also added that I intended to bring my husband along for the experience, so opening their doors to me would mean opening their doors to him too. After a couple of e-mails back and forth confirming details, and

[3] When I use the word "sustainable" or "sustainably", I am referring to the notion that both human and environmental practices and relations can be maintained indefinitely.

one brief phone conversation, I received a vague invitation for both myself and my husband to come and visit the community and partake in a week long program run by Cedar River known as the 'Community Orientation Program' (COP).

This was a great opportunity to get an introduction to the community in a way that was not too different from what other people, who were actually intending on making the move into the intentional community, received. COP was meant to be a gateway, of sorts, into the community. The intention of the program was to introduce people to what life was like at Cedar River through a series of informal discussions, led by a variety of community members, on most aspects of community life. At the end of the program, those who decided that they were interested in living at Cedar River would make that intention known to the community, and the rest would move on. As for myself and my husband, it was made known to me that we would be considered for residence as long as there was available housing at the end of the program. When the program ended, there was indeed going to be enough room, or so Maryanne had judged, so I was asked to fill out an application, same as if I was applying for community membership, explaining my intentions clearly. I handed in the application and my husband and I were accepted as 'renters' into the community for an initial three months.

Taking part in the COP provided me with the information I needed to start becoming a community resident. (I later discovered that much of the material covered in COP, although presented from an open and honest viewpoint, had a certain idealistic bent to it). It was not at all hard to make a place for myself within the Cedar River community, as the group of people living there clearly respected motivated individuals who wanted to contribute their time, skills and energy to furthering the intentions of the community; and that is just what I did (See Hammersley and Atkinson 1983 as regards the importance of making oneself useful in the field). I got involved with any, and nearly every, activity that needing doing, from bathroom cleaning to wood shed building. Most days I left my cabin at 8:30am to eat breakfast with the community residents and did not return until after dark, quite exhausted by the array of activities that had filled my day. There were activities that I participated in on a regular basis, such as attending certain meetings or helping out in the kitchen, however I also possessed the ability to spontaneously

jump in on projects and conversations that might arise on-the-spot. I took on the 'traditional' anthropological role of participant-observer (Robson 1995), and also gained the invaluable experience of living the 'everyday life' of a community resident (refer to the discussion above on 'everyday lives').

As a keen participant-observer, I quickly became familiar with the weekly routines of community life, knowing when and where I could access the various community residents in order to offer my assistance with their daily tasks. The following is a list of some key activities that occurred (almost) daily at Cedar River:

- Meal preparation and clean-up in the communal kitchen
- Some form of gardening and land work
- Office work, including event and course planning and administrative tasks
- Cleaning of communal spaces and educational centre facilities
- Some form of building or maintenance work
- Childcare activities
- Meetings[4]
- Evening gatherings

Thus, I got to know a wide range of community residents. I was given access to meetings and gatherings that were only open to community 'members', which allowed me to develop a fairly detailed knowledge of the organisational workings of Cedar River. Additionally, I was invited to help out with some of the educational programs offered by the Educational Center. The courses offered most regularly were:

- Eco-village and permaculture
- Permaculture design
- Introductory personal growth
- Personal growth for graduates of the introductory course

This allowed me to meet many of the students and gather their perspectives, while also gaining first-hand insight into the types of information that were being taught in the communally-run courses. I even took one of the personal growth courses offered

[4] The types of meetings that took place at Cedar River are detailed in Chapter Three.

at Cedar River in an effort to better understand the underlying beliefs and values inherit in much of the interpersonal communication I witnessed.

To all intents and purposes, I was treated like a community member by nearly every person on the land within a few months of my residence. While this afforded me ample opportunities for doing research, it also made it extremely difficult for me to remain dedicated to my purposes as a researcher. This struggle is not unique, as many an anthropologist has had to deal with this crisis of subjectivity while in the field. It could be argued that it is more likely to occur to those of us who conduct 'anthropology at home', due to the lack of initial epistemic distance; however, I tend to agree with Bowman (1997) that "the difference between us and others lies in the specific characters and consequent configurations of the social facts we encounter", not some outdated notion of bounded cultural distance (pg 45). Thus, the fact that I happen to have been born and bred in the United States was less a factor in my crisis of subjectivity than was the general circumstance of being an anthropologist in the field (See Strathern 1985 for further discussion on the role of the anthropologist in 'at home' situations).

I do, however, feel as if this crisis is what led to my ultimate focus on the experience of living meaningful lives. Allowing myself to get caught up in the daily activity of the community - in other words, being a community member and working towards the realisation of the community mission – provided me with a sense of fulfilment, nearly on a daily basis, during the first portion of my fieldwork. Others would recognise my work as useful and meaningful, and fellow residents would often ask for input or advice on their own activities. When I was finally able to take some distance from the field, I realised that the way I had interpreted my experiences at Cedar River – as ones that were fulfilling for a variety of reasons - was quite likely similar to other residents' interpretations of their own experiences. Therefore, I used the latter portion of my research to investigate this idea more thoroughly.

The last four months of my fieldwork were dedicated to conducting semi-structured interviews of nearly every community resident. I recorded these interviews with the permission of each resident, and later transcribed a good proportion in order to check for persistent themes. The interviews focussed on the various aspects of everyday life at Cedar River and how they were linked to personal

and communal goal fulfilment. As such, the interviews revealed the beliefs, values and morals residents attached to the fulfilment of various goals. Additionally, the one-on-one interviews allowed for me to have a structured and intimate encounter with a multitude of residents so that relevant biographic details – particularly as they pertained to the decision to move into intentional community – could be gathered (See Lee 1993 as regards to benefits of individual vs. group interviews).

Two final points that have had some bearing on the outcomes of my research remain to be acknowledged. The first is of an ethical nature, namely the decision to give the intentional community I researched, as well as the participants in my research, pseudonyms. This decision was mainly my own, though I did receive feedback from a few community residents who agreed with my decision. Initially, I left the decision up to the community residents, but having received a minimal response, I chose to avoid any potential damage that the analysis in my thesis might cause to the reputation of the community-as-a-whole, or to individual residents of the community, and decided upon the use of pseudonyms. I am, however, aware that those who are involved with the community I call Cedar River will be able to identify certain people and, of course, the community-as-a-whole. I made this reality explicit many times during the course of my fieldwork and residents were accepting of this fact.

The second point was mentioned briefly in the beginning of this section, which is that I did, in fact, bring my husband to the field with me for the entirety of the research. He spent most of his time in the nearby city earning money to maintain our subsistence; however he inevitably became part of the field through the relationships he developed with community residents in the evenings and on weekends. This absolutely had an impact on my access to certain community residents, as well as my ability to recall certain details from the field once we had left. Moreover, his presence provided me with a constant reminder of the world outside of the field, which was quite important, as Cedar River could become an all encompassing world for many who resided there.

Thesis Overview

The thesis is divided into seven main chapters. The first five analyse particular domains of social life in an effort to illuminate the ways in which Cedar River

residents were constructing, negotiating and actualising various communal and individual beliefs, values and morals through daily activity. The final two chapters focus, respectively, on what I call the two 'projects' evident at Cedar River, namely sustainability and well-being. These projects were pursued on a daily basis through activities specifically aimed at demonstrating progress towards these projects, but also via much of the other intentional activity that takes place throughout the day, as these projects are what frame Cedar River's ultimate mission as a non-profit organisation and intentional community. In this way, the final two chapters build on the first five so as to give a picture of how goal actualisation in the various areas of social life, while contributing to the experience of life as meaningful through the realisation of beliefs, values and morals, become meaningful in a larger context, as projects do not have a definitive end-point, but are pursued throughout life or for as long as they continue to provide meaning for one's life.

I begin with the domain of 'community' and explore the various conceptions residents held in relation to its meaning, as well as the multiple ways in which 'community' was being realised in the everyday lives of Cedar River residents. Chapter Two follows on to examine interpersonal relationships between the residents of Cedar River, suggesting that what conceptually sits at the core of sociality at Cedar River – intimacy - is in fact different than what we tend to find in modern American society. I highlight this claim by analysing residents' views and everyday actions in regard to familial relations, sex, and sexuality. Chapter Three looks at the organisational structures that existed, and were in the process of revision, during my time at Cedar River. Through an ethnographic focus on meetings, I illuminate the underlying beliefs, values and morals held by residents, and the community-as-a-whole, thereby demonstrating how residents were attempting to realise these through their everyday activities.

In Chapter Four I shift from a predominate focus on the relations between humans, to that of human-environment interaction. I do so by exploring the main environmental discourses that circulated among Cedar River residents and illustrating how the beliefs, values and morals inherent in them were being actualised through daily practices. Ultimately I suggest that adherence to such discourses allows residents to form meaningful relationships with their environments. This

suggestion becomes more pointed in Chapter Five, which looks at food and food-related practices at Cedar River. There were quite a large number of food-related requirements that were taken into account via the development of standard food practices at Cedar River. These requirements were derived from the variety of beliefs, values and morals residents held in relation to the production, distribution, obtainment, preparation and consumption of food. Thus, I argue, through adhering to these practices, residents were meaningfully engaging with some of the larger processes upon which our daily survival depends.

Chapter Six is the first of two chapters which look at the projects in progress at Cedar River. It explores the concept of sustainability, particularly as it was being used by residents at Cedar River. By comparing the many ways that Cedar River residents attempt to address sustainability to sustainable development objectives, I ultimately work to demonstrate how intentional community should be understood as a context which is concerned with social progress. Chapter Seven furthers this argument by analysing both, the concept of well-being, and the ways in which Cedar River residents were striving to increase their own and others experience of well-being through everyday practices. Well-being is understood as complementary to the project of sustainability. Essentially, the pursuit of well-being is the pursuit of an improved quality of life. I argue, therefore, that demonstrating ways in which individuals and groups might pursue well-being through the everyday experience of it, not only allows life to be understood as meaningful for the residents of Cedar River (and potentially intentional community residents in general), but also allows for intentional community to be understood as a model for social progress.

Emergent Themes – Self and Identity

As this thesis addresses beliefs, values and morals, and how they are realised through the daily activities associated with individual and communal goal attainment, it also inevitably raises questions about those processes associated with the conceptualisation and negotiation of selfhood and identity for both individual residents and the community-as-a-whole. This is a recurrent theme in each of the first five chapters. As a result, I have chosen to say a few introductory words about this here.

Selfhood, and how it is constituted, is a central focus of much anthropological enquiry. Throughout this thesis, I understand the self to be "the totality of what an organism is physically, biologically, psychologically, socially and culturally" (Quinn 2006: 362), in contrast to those definitions which would reduce the self to a 'sense of self' or a 'self-presentation'. This does not suggest, however, that I understand the self to be 'bounded' or 'coherent' in the way that much anthropological writing about Western conceptions of self seems to portray it (see Spiro 1993 for a good overview of the Western conception of self). Rather I am suggesting that selfhood is constituted and experienced through a variety of processes, all of which should be given equal attention in anthropological analysis. Thus it is that selfhood is constituted in relation to what is other, as equally as it is constituted through the triggering of emotions within the body.

Additionally, the concept of identity is a significant feature of much anthropological analysis. I understand the identity/ies of a given subject to be "multiple, produced within discourse and potentially contradictory" (Kondo 1990: 36), yet crucial for the production of meaning. Our identity/ies signify our beliefs, values and morals, and identification with groups provide us with social sanctioning. Our identities are continually produced and reproduced throughout our lives, and thus should not be seen a constitutive of self, but rather as contributing to the experience of self.

Some of Final Points

Many of the beliefs, values and practices attributed to Cedar River residents that I describe throughout the thesis are reminiscent of those found among 'New Agers'. While the 'New Age' encompasses a massive variety of people, practices and beliefs and it would not be wholly wrong to call many of the Cedar River residents New Agers, I have refrained from doing so for two main reasons. First, the New Age is often associated with overt spirituality or, as Heelas suggests, "[i]t has come to be used to designate those who maintain that inner spirituality – embedded within the self and the natural order as a whole – serves as *the* key to moving from all that is wrong with life to all that is right" (1996: 16, emphasis in original). While many of the residents of Cedar River were undoubtedly spiritual and I witnessed a multitude of spiritual practices during my time there, spirituality was not an overriding focus of

the community. Therefore, residents did not appear to derive meaning from their spiritual practices in any way that was directly related to them being practiced in the context of intentional community and thus, spirituality has not featured prominently in this thesis. Consequently, I felt the use of 'New Age' as a descriptor could be misleading. Second, community residents did not identify themselves as New Agers. It has been suggested that many who would be considered part of the New Age (by academics) would not necessarily identify themselves as such (Sutcliffe 2003); however, I felt that to do so would not only be inaccurate, but it would detract from the new visions of social life arising from within the intentional communities movement. In particular, I refer to the move being made towards eco-village construction, which I discuss in greater detail in both Chapter Four and the Conclusion to this thesis.

Finally, I have chosen to use the past tense, rather than the 'ethnographic present', in my analysis of Cedar River. I have done so for two reasons. First, I am aware that many (certainly not all) of the processes I describe have changed or are in the process of changing due to a major change in resident make-up since the time of my departure. Therefore, to use the present tense is, in effect, to deny my knowledge of these changes. Second, people who lived at Cedar River during the time of my research, and perhaps others from within the intentional communities movement, may be interested in reading this thesis, and whatever may come after. I would, therefore, like to make it clear that this is time and people specific (except for when I link attitudes, etc. to a more general population) in order to avoid any negative effect on the community from those who are able to identify it despite my use of a pseudonym.

Chapter One

The Conceptualisation and Actualisation of 'Community'

This thesis explores the everyday activity that residents of an intentional community partake in, in order that we might gain new insights into the ways in which certain socio-cultural aspects of a given context, such as explicitness of values, work to assist individuals in experiencing their lives as meaningful. The present chapter addresses this topic by focussing on the concept of 'community', as the realisation of community is a central concern of intentional community. Through exploring various conceptions of community in relation to the everyday experiences of community at Cedar River, I illustrate how community acts as both a defining quality of a meaningful life, as well as a framework through which residents can come to be identified with each other and the land as a 'context of value'.

What Do We Mean When We Say "Community"?

Community is generally likened to natural affiliations of one form or another (Brown 2002). In common usage, a community refers to a group of associated bodies, sometimes concentrated in one physical place, which is characterised by some form of sociality (Minar and Greer 1969: ix). Communities are assumed to exist wherever there is humanity, as community implies bonds of commonality and feelings of belonging. We are constantly bombarded with calls to recognise the needs of marginalised communities, newspaper advertisements highlighting local community actions, laments from members of older generations regarding the breakdown of community in modern life and bumper stickers urging us to become part of a global community dedicated to addressing climate change. What is meant by community in each of these instances? The first example seems to assume affiliation due to ethnicity or cultural homogeneity, while the second assumes affiliation due to a common locality, the third assumes a quality of social life in community and the fourth an affiliation based on moral or political concerns.

There has been much debate in academia around exactly what is meant by the word community. On closer examination, it has not been a term that is easily defined and has, at times, been thought of as completely useless or meaningless due to the

variety of ways in which the term is invoked (Amit 2002; Cohen 2000). Yet, anthropologists, along with other social researchers, have long had an interest in the study of communities - that is, groups of affiliated persons limited to a given locality - as they conveniently provide a scale of human organisation that is easily accessible and somewhat clearly bounded. In fact, "[a]nthropologists conventionally studied communities (villages, tribes, islands) because they were regarded as the key structural units of social life" (Rapport and Overing 2000:62).

Rapport and Overing (2000), in their brief overview of the use of the concept of 'community' in socio-cultural anthropological thought, summarise that there have been three traditional ways of approaching community – as a group that shares common interests, a common ecology, or a common social structure or system. They also point out that, evolutionarily speaking, community has been thought of as a social milieu that is being replaced by capitalism and individualism. The remainder of this discussion on community, however, is limited to the authors whose theories have proven themselves most informative to my analysis. First, I turn to a brief overview of Tönnies' notions of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, followed by Redfield's work on the 'little community', as both understand community in a way that speaks to how Cedar River was conceived of in the abstract by both residents and non-residents alike – that is, as a non-industrial social setting wherein persons work co-operatively together and recognise themselves as part of a social whole. This image, I suggest, is a fundamentally Western idealisation of communal life. I finish with a discussion of Cohen, Rapport and Anderson, respectively, as all three lend themselves to a more nuanced discussion of the significance of the use of community as a concept at Cedar River.

Tönnies developed the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in the late 19th century as a way to explain the evolution of society and, in doing so, created a prime illustration of the pre-capitalistic, non-industrial community. As Pitirim Sorokin notes in the Foreword to the 1955 English version of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Tönnies' theory about these different types of society is essentially a reformulation of a theory of society which has a long genealogy dating back to such thinkers as Confucius and Plato, and continuing on after Tönnies in the work of well known social theorists such as Durkheim (1995: v – vii). Nevertheless, Tönnies'

particular formulation has proven itself significant, not least because many of the conclusions he drew about the *Gesellschaft* type of society have come to be accepted as reality to a large extent. In essence, Tönnies suggested that there are two types of society, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, the latter being the result of an evolutionary process in which the former gradually becomes transformed into the latter as society becomes more individualistic and capitalistic. Thus, *Gemeinschaft* is envisaged quintessentially as "the rural village community, which attains its consummation in the cultivation of the soil practiced in common and the possession of common property in village fields or land held in common by the village" (Tönnies translated by Loomis 1955: 26) while *Gesellschaft* is "essentially a collective of economic character composed primarily of those who partake in that wealth which, as land and capital, represents the necessary means to the production of goods of all kinds" (Tönnies translated by Loomis 1955: 28). In other words, in the *Gemeinschaft* type of society, common goods and interests, often understood in the form of community, is central, whereas in the *Gesellschaft* type of society (i.e. the type of society we in the West have been participating in for hundreds of years), individual interests are paramount and community has a limited place in everyday lives.

Another notable contribution to the understanding of what is meant by the word community was provided by Robert Redfield (1960) in his publication that sought to compare various tools of analysis suited to the study of community. Redfield suggests that there are four defining qualities of 'little communities' (a term which he appears to use interchangeably with 'small community' and simply community throughout *The Little Community*) – distinctiveness, size conducive to being studied as a whole, homogeneity, and a large degree of self-sufficiency. Most importantly, Redfield insists that, when analysing communities, they are to be thought of as wholes, as "something that retains identity and completeness" (1960: 12). As such, social structure, ecological system, and worldview, for example, are simply different perspectives from which we can begin to understand, and thus define, the systematic whole of community. From this perspective, community becomes synonymous to traditional anthropological views about culture, place, and identity (i.e. that one necessarily determines the others) (Amit 2002).

Furthermore, Redfield notes that the more complex the society, the less likely it is that the four defining qualities of the 'little community' stated above will be fully realised in any given community. In *Peasant Society and Culture*, Redfield gives as an example the 'peasant community', which is neither isolated like the remote 'primitive community', nor is it the author of what he refers to as 'the great traditions' (i.e. those traditions that come from the philosopher, the theologian or the literary man and are cultivated in schools and other large institutions) of their civilisation. Instead, the 'peasant community' is the bearer of both 'little (i.e. local) traditions' and 'great traditions', meaning that it is unable to be studied as an isolated, homogenous, self-sufficient whole, but instead must be understood in the context of the greater civilisation to which it belongs. Thus, we can summarise that the 'little community' of Redfield's original description refers to a certain pre-industrial, pre-capitalistic ideal much like Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft*.

More recently, we have Cohen's (1985) influential book on community, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. Cohen argues that community must be understood as a relational concept which expresses both a shared symbolic form, to which many individual meanings might be attached, and a distinction from that which falls outside it. Consequently, he suggests that a useful way to analyse what is meant by the term 'community' is to look at how the symbolic boundaries of a given community are constituted (p13). In this way, we might come to see more clearly how community, as a symbol, "is held in common by its members; but its meaning varies with its members' unique orientations to it" (Cohen 1985: 15). Cohen is therefore departing from the general trend of analysing community as a homogenous whole which thereby becomes a determinant of individual identity, and instead chooses to look at individuals' beliefs and feelings and how these come to be understood as a shared symbolic form. Thus, as we will see further on in this chapter, Cohen's argument becomes useful as means through which we might understand how the variety of meanings Cedar River residents attach to the concept of community are able to exist within the boundaries of the same community.

Rapport (2002) also maintains that communities are not to be thought of as wholes, as entities that possess agency in and of themselves. Instead, communities are to be examined through the processes of "ongoing interpretations and

interactions" that occur for individuals within communities (2002: 8). Rapport's use of the concept of community comes from an analysis of 'cultural communities', a phrase which Amit (2002) points out has been a recent trend in anthropological thought regarding the meaning of community. 'Cultural' or 'ethnic' community as a descriptor arose in response to the need to categorically encompass displaced or dispersed peoples who still identify as a collective due to some perceived difference from their surrounding others. Essentially, Rapport's analysis warns of the dangers of privileging the collectivity of community over the agency of individuals and is therefore useful to this analysis as it suggests a possible way of understanding the seemingly constant interest Cedar River residents had in negotiating what was meant by the word community.

One final contribution to the social scientific conception of community that is worth a mention here is Anderson's (1991 [1983]) notion of 'imagined communities'. Anderson's theory is an attempt at explaining communities that are *not* defined by regular social interaction, such as nations. He suggests that the nation, as an imagined community, only became a possibility with the flourishing of the novel and the newspaper (i.e. mass media) in eighteenth century Europe, as "these forms provided the technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation" (Anderson 1991 [1983]:25). Crucial to this argument is the ability of these forms of media to give the impression of a steady, homogenous movement through time for those members who identify with, or are identified as part of, the community of feature. Additionally, Anderson notes that certain everyday occurrences that result from the availability of mass media, such as viewing an anonymous member of the public reading the same newspaper as oneself, work to reassure individuals that the community of their imagination is indeed rooted to everyday experience (pgs.35-36). This understanding of community becomes significant for understanding the use of 'community' at Cedar River, as it helps to illuminate how certain images of community are derived from the wider network of intentional community seekers and residents throughout the world, and more specifically throughout the U.S., and how the meanings associated with these images also feed into the common symbolic form known as 'community' at Cedar River.

To summarise, both Tönnies (1955) and Redfield (1960) provide us with a useful understanding of how community was envisaged, in the abstract, by both Cedar River residents and non-residents alike. They set the scene from which we can move on to explore the significance of community as a concept at Cedar River, particularly in relation to the actualisation of community. Cohen's (1985) emphasis on multiple meanings and shared symbolic forms, and the creation of symbolic boundaries, becomes pertinent both because it illuminates how the diverse meanings residents attached to the concept of community might work to create a shared overarching symbolic form known as community, as well as highlights the importance of the fact that Cedar River, being an intentional community, has chosen to set themselves apart from the rest of American society and thus have defined themselves in opposition to what they are not. Rapport's (2002) assertion that community be thought of as an ongoing process created by individuals, not an ontologically prior given, is important for building the argument I make in this chapter, as it explains why it is that the meaning of community was forever renegotiable for each resident. Indeed, Rapport's suggestion is an obvious continuation of current anthropological thought which views 'culture' in a similar way. Finally, Anderson's (1983) conception of the 'imagined community' is useful in that it suggests how the conception and actualisation of community at Cedar River might be tied to larger processes through mass communication networks such as the internet.

Residents' Conceptions of Community

People who create, or come to live in, intentional communities have histories of their own, past experiences which inform the ways in which they, personally, might come to think about community. Thus, gaining an understanding of how community is conceived of by the residents of an intentional community is important, as their conceptions will influence the ways in which community might be realised as part of the project of intentional community. At Cedar River, community was conceived of in two general ways: as a quality of social life and as a type of social grouping. By no means are these conceptions mutually exclusive, as will emerge in the discussion below.

I begin with an excerpt from an interview with one resident, Evan, a twenty-something male who had been living at Cedar River for about a year at the time of our interview. In response to my question regarding changes he had noticed in himself over his time at Cedar River he said:

> There's some people that I just haven't really *naturally* felt a strong connection with and I've had the idea that I *need* to or *should* have that with everybody, 'cause this is my community and all that. And I've just let go of that idea.
>
> (Evan, Interview, July 24, 2007)

Evan was not unique in this instance. There tended to be an expectation on the part of new and potential residents at Cedar River that a quality of social life, described as 'community', would automatically be experienced upon being recognised as part of the intentional community. I argue that this is due to the fact that *rural* intentional communities are commonly associated with an imagination of the 'rural idyll' or a return to the types of rural communities that were supposed to contain 'natural' support networks and friendships due their relative isolation from the commodities of city life (Tönnies 1955; Anderson 1960; Redfield 1960; Frankenberg 1966). If we consider the illustrations of community provided by Tönnies and Redfield, which encapsulate a fundamentally Western idealistic view of communal life based on a certain interpretation of history, then it becomes clear why this connection was so often made. The notion that small, supportive communities have been replaced by large, socially isolating cities due largely to economic forces is embedded in the Western psyche. Consequently, community, in the eyes of new and potential members, came to be understood as a quality of social life (for example, community meant close social relationships) thought to be inherent in a place called 'intentional community' (I expand on this idea further in a section below entitled 'Place for Community').

However, for the more settled-in residents, community, while being conceived of as a quality of social life, was thought to be a result of ongoing processes (Rapport 2002). The following excerpt from an interview I conducted with Kate, a mature, twenty-something who had lived at Cedar River for a few years at the time of our interview, illustrates my point:

> **Kate:** I want any way for there to be sub-communities within this one… that are bound by some real affinity, rather than just all liking the name Cedar

River for some reason. You know? When we were just starting to grow, I felt like I didn't really know what bound us together. We don't have a common goal. Our mission statement is so broad that it seemed like it would be a good idea to have people who were here because of ecology… could have a sub-community and people who were here because of personal growth could have a sub-community and, of course, everyone's thing would relate. Or how about people who want to live off the grid. Forget about why we are here, like the way we want to live…we can have an 'off the grid' sub-community and a 'bathtub and entertainment centre' sub-community and a 'social activist' [community], who can carpool back into town for the things they do.

Me: So what I hear you saying is that you see that, in some ways, people are here living together but you don't see a common thread that runs through every person here.

Kate: Not at all. And people will say, "that's not what Cedar River's about!" and you are like "well it is for me". People will even talk about what Cedar River's about and mean utterly different things.

Me: Does that worry you in any way? Do you feel disenchanted?

Kate: I don't feel anymore like I'm staying here forever. I never really did, but I didn't feel like I wasn't. Now I feel like I'm not. I'm here 'til I find the people to go be community with. And, I'm really drawn to the model of community where you don't have a website with an explanation of how you become a member and people who do searches for intentional communities because they want to live in an intentional community, some intentional community, then go look and see how you talk about yourself on the website, and then see if they can move in with you. I want a community where people join because they love me…because they love us and we love them. Well there's this community in Germany that I know and the main things they do are wood…mostly firewood cutting. But they invite all communes in Germany to come cut firewood there and then they have firewood camps. And a choir. They do a communities choir. So they do those things and they have people come in for those things, but it's not about membership. It's not about anything else really and they just live together. When I ask them "how do you get new members?" it's like, well, someone comes around and meets us and they really like us so they come around again and then they come around a bunch more times. And then we think "gee, why don't you live with us?" and that's really the way I see it.

(Interview Aug. 29, 2007)

In many intentional communities, Cedar River included, individuals will be accepted as members based on compatibility with the group as a whole, not on their bonds of love or friendship with each resident. For this reason, co-habitation often comes before strong emotional bonds are formed in intentional communities, and as we can

see, this does not always fit into residents' ideal conception of community. It is clear from the excerpt above that Kate disliked the notion held by some that a social grouping that was called an 'intentional community' would automatically provide a certain quality of community between its members. For Kate, feelings of love between people became the primary referent of community and the social grouping, i.e. living and working together, was simply a result of feeling a certain quality of community. Community in this conceptualisation is understood as a quality of social life, though not a quality that is given by virtue of being part of a group called "community", but rather a quality created through social processes that allow for the recognition of mutual affection.

However, as I mentioned above, community, as a quality of social life, was not the only way in which Cedar River residents conceived of community. Community was also conceived of as a type of social grouping that signified affiliation. For instance, in an article written by a Cedar River member aimed at introducing outsiders to Cedar River, the group of people living at Cedar River, referred to as "the community", is likened to an "extended family" (Cedar River produced booklet 2006: 25). Additionally, in the interview excerpt above, Kate implies that community is indeed a social grouping, one that results from a certain quality of social life, also known as community.

The use of the term "community" to connote both a quality of social life and a type of social grouping can be further illustrated by the ethnographic excerpt that follows. During an educational session regarding community-building and intentional community that was part of the month long eco-village and permaculture design course run by Cedar River, the session leaders proposed a game entitled "That's Not Community" as a way to begin a discussion of the ideas and feelings people held about community. The session participants included two Cedar River community members (who were taking the course) and about fifteen other course participants, as well as Alex (a Cedar River community member) and Lucien (a former member of various intentional communities, though not Cedar River) who were leading the session.

The game was organised as follows: the 'game show hosts', played by Alex and Lucien, would describe a scenario that one might come across in intentional

community and then explain how it had been dealt with. After the scenario was given, participants were encouraged to yell out 'That's not community!' if they felt the scenario described a behaviour which is not associated with communal living. In one scenario, Alex and Lucien described a child with a runny nose and cough running up to the front of the food line and touching all the available food with germ-filled hands. This, they explained, was breaking the community's agreements of washing hands before serving oneself food from communal dishes. They then explained that the situation with the child was dealt with by everyone simply ignoring the child, as the child's parents were not around and no one wanted to claim responsibility for reprimanding the child. 'Audience' members then exclaimed "That's not community"; however, not everyone joined in.

This prompted a quick discussion as to why some people felt this scenario did not describe community, while others did. Each of the conceptions discussed related to community as a quality of social life, as the example given by the game show hosts framed community in this manner. For some, community meant that everyone took responsibility for the children, whether or not they were biologically related to oneself personally. For others, community meant upholding and enforcing all agreements, no matter what the circumstances. Still for others, community meant letting others do as they like, as long as their actions were not really hurting anyone. By the end of this game, it became clear that there were many ways in which people were envisioning how community was actualised through everyday actions.

Another discussion followed this game, which was a further attempt at highlighting the differences in conception regarding community. This discussion presented intentional community in a structural manner, which lent itself to conceptualisations of community as both a quality of social life and a social form. It began with Alex drawing a visual aid on the white board to illustrate the spectrum of governance strategies that one is likely to find in intentional communities. At one end of the spectrum Alex placed "hierarchical", which he stated was characterised to the furthest extent by communities that have a "charismatic leader". At the other end he placed "non-hierarchical", which had "anarchic" governance as it's most extreme example. In between the two extremes, Alex placed "leaders/managers", "voting majority", "partial consensus" and "consensus", in order from most to least

hierarchical. Alex then wrote "no need for close relationships" over the hierarchical end of the spectrum, while over the non-hierarchical side he wrote "very close relationships". He then pointed out that "community vision and focus" can be very strong on the hierarchical end of the spectrum, while it can be very fuzzy and unclear on the non-hierarchical end.

Alex also drew another spectrum in order to illustrate the varying opinions on collectivism one might find within intentional community. The spectrum began with 'individualism' on one side and moved through private property, social democracy, co-housing, co-ops and income-sharing. These communal forms, Alex explained, operated with varying degrees of emphasis on collective priority, with intentional communities that promote individualism possessing the least amount of communal interdependence and those which define themselves as income-sharing placing the greatest emphasis on the collective good. According to Alex, most intentional communities are thought to fall somewhere between co-housing - intentional communities that share use and costs of certain facilities, but remain individually responsible for the costs of personal living spaces and other personal needs - and income-sharing - intentional communities that provide for all personal needs from a communal purse - in terms of collectivism.

Multiple Meanings, A Shared Symbolic Form

The conceptualisations of community that have been explained above vary greatly. Not only is community being thought of as both a quality of social life and a type of social grouping by Cedar River residents, it is being thought of as multiple qualities and multiple social groupings. Furthermore, as was illustrated by Alex's spectrums, community at Cedar River was also being conceived of in relation to the larger intentional communities network located across the United States and the world more generally. While I do not wish to take the time here to discuss in great detail Cedar River's connection to other intentional communities, it is necessary to note that more than one resident of Cedar River had lived in other intentional communities prior to coming to Cedar River and many visitors had also visited or lived in other intentional communities. This, combined with the online database of intentional communities (in which Cedar River was included) one could access through the FIC (Fellowship for Intentional Community), created the illusion that Cedar River was simply one

point of reference within the larger social grouping of community enthusiasts. In other words, as is suggested by Anderson's (1983) notion of the 'imagined community', Cedar River, as a whole, was a member of a larger community of (broadly speaking, anti-mainstream) communities. And thus, it becomes possible for Cedar River residents to conceive of community in additional ways, such as "partial consensus" or "income-sharing", which are clearly derived from within the intentional communities network.

This prompts us to ask how it was that Cedar River remained a self-defined community, which suggests some kind of social cohesion, when residents clearly were attaching a multitude of individual meanings to the word community. Or, to put it differently, if the realisation of community is central to the project of intentional community, how can a group of people with such varying conceptions of what community means work together to realise it? This is precisely where Cohen (1985) offers some suggestions. As was stated in the discussion on Cohen above, community can be understood as a symbolic form that is shared by its members, despite the fact that the meanings individual members attach to it might vary. Cohen states:

> Symbols are effective because they are imprecise…They are, therefore, ideal media through which people can speak a 'common' language, behave in apparently similar ways, participate in the 'same' rituals, pray to the 'same' gods, wear similar clothes, and so forth, without subordinating themselves to the tyranny of orthodoxy.
>
> (1985:21)

Furthermore, community, in Cohen's formulation, not only refers to an assumed similarity between members, but also a difference from what is outside, established by recognition of a symbolic boundary (p.16). Thus, locating the symbolic bounds of a given community can be instructive for identifying the shared symbolic form to which 'community' refers. In the case of Cedar River, the most obvious boundary that existed between the residents and others was the legal bounds of the land. In other words, the residents of Cedar River lived together on a bit of land that was separate from the rest of neighbourhood within which it was placed. This gives us the first hint as to the common symbolic form to which community referred at Cedar River. The mission statement, to which each resident was asked to subscribe when living on the land, points more concretely towards that form. In general terms, the

mission states that the organisation seeks to educate the public in areas of social and ecological sustainability while working to sustain an intentional community which acts as an on-site demonstration of experimentation with the concept of sustainability.

Thus, we can conclude that the common symbolic form to which community refers at Cedar River can be summed up as: working and living together on a shared piece of land in order to lead ecologically and socially sustainable lives and use the knowledge gained from this experience to educate the rest of society about ecological and social sustainability. The following responses to my question as to the "common thread" that held Cedar River together confirm this suggestion:

> "We all want to live together and we want to get along and support each other."
>
> (Burke, Interview Sept. 7, 2007)

> "Trying to live with less, maybe. Live comfortably with less and thus be more joyful."
>
> (Nicole, Interview July 25, 2007)

> "I'm all about teaching and learning and that's what this place is about, as far as I can see"
>
> (Rupert, Interview Aug. 7, 2007)

> "Most people are really in tune with the educational aspect of sustainability, teaching sustainability to people. And living communally, as well. I think that definitely is a common thread amongst everybody here. I couldn't really see somebody wanting to be here if they really weren't in tune with those things. I think there might be a third thing too…that interpersonal connectedness. And the sharing of each other's energies and personalities"
>
> (Frank, Interview Aug. 31, 2007)

> "They like the community aspect. They like the working together aspects…There's definitely something in the mission statement for everybody here."
>
> (Dan, Interview Sept. 6, 2007)

It is clear that this common symbolic form, known as 'community' to Cedar River residents, is very broad and therefore has the capacity to encompass a huge range of individual meanings while still working to create the appearance of coherence. For some residents, this broadness allowed for enough diversity in the residential makeup of the community to maintain a good balance. As one long-term Cedar River resident, Roger, explains:

> I have seen people trying to commit to common values or a common lifestyle or whatever, who have way more conflicts with each other than we have because we are more open to diversity. It doesn't necessarily make for a happier grouping to have people who think they all agree on the same thing.
>
> (Roger, Interview Sept. 2, 2007)

However, the fact that community encompassed a broad spectrum of individual meanings at Cedar River also led to a general dispersal of focus and human energy, as there were seemingly endless ways in which community might be realised by residents. And yet, despite this dispersal, Cedar River continued to exist and residents continued to feel as if they were working towards the realisation of their individual and common goals.

'Community' and Selfhood

After spending a fair amount of time amongst the residents of Cedar River, I began to see how the various conceptualisations of 'community' caused some amount of tension both for residents and between residents, particularly when it came to defining exactly how members viewed themselves in relation to one another. Moreover, this seemed an *ongoing* tension for Cedar River members due, not only to the fact that they were continually admitting new residents and saying good-bye to those who had decided to move on, but also because, as mentioned above, community must be understood as an ongoing process, the meaning of which can change for individuals over time (Rapport 2000). Because of this transience and the ongoing process of establishing the meaning of community for individuals, 'community' was negotiated and re/interpreted, to some extent, with each new arrival. However, the disjuncture between the multiple uses of 'community' did not go wholly unrecognised by the residents.

If you will recall from the interview excerpt above, Kate expressed a desire for 'community' that engaged one aspect, or several aspects, of an individual's life (such as social activism and/or personal growth) rather than an all encompassing sense of 'community' that engaged "whole persons", as in Redfield's (1960) conceptualisation. This notion of 'community' is one that is becoming more and more desirable among those interested in communal living and fits more closely with the eco-village model of intentional community. Until recently, intentional community was thought to denote a type of 'community' that entails "intense

personal interaction, different from the normal casual neighborliness of suburban life" (Sutton 2004). In other words, 'community' within intentional community was thought to be similar to that of the "traditional community", wherein daily face-to-face interaction demanded coherent and consistent selves, identifiable by their enduring authenticity (Gergen 1991: 211).

Yet, as the idea of the eco-village, which places a greater emphasis on "healthy human development" (Gilman 1991) through varying levels of participation in 'community' life, catches on, more people who are choosing to live communally desire this less intense engagement with 'community', thereby creating a demand for alternative understandings of what 'community' denotes in intentional community (Svensson 2002). If we follow Gergen's (1991) analysis of the Western self as it enters into the postmodern era, an era characterised by the globalised technologies of mass communication and transport, one could argue that the desire for 'community' embodied by Kate's "sub-community" model, or the more general eco-village model, is simply an expression of the possession of a postmodern consciousness. Gergen suggests that a postmodern consciousness is one in which the self is no longer conceptualised as a "personal essence", but is rather understood to be the result of relationships (1991: 170). If the self is understood to be the result of relationships, then 'community' becomes about the self as imagined and experienced in relation to the group. 'Community', in this conceptualisation, is not, therefore, a context through which the self is revealed, but rather a web of relationships through which the self is conceptualised and identity is gained.

Kate was certainly not alone in expressing her concern that 'community', as it was currently understood in the context of intentional community, might no longer fit with the majority of residents' conceptualisations of themselves in relation to the group. This became obvious during a group activity that was organised as part of the yearly planning session known as "Visioning". "Visioning" took place at about the same time every year and was usually a block of approximately four days dedicated to planning the year ahead in terms of budgets, short and long term goals, projects and any other major decisions that required the focus of the entire Cedar River community membership. The particular activity that I refer to occurred on the first

day of the January 2007 Visioning session, a day which is usually reserved for "clearing" and reconnection[5] between 'community' members.

The activity was entitled a "community intentions exercise" on the schedule that was sent around earlier in the morning. It was introduced as an imagination exercise to the members and everybody was asked to describe what Cedar River would be like in ten years time. Everybody appeared to take the exercise seriously and after fifteen minutes of thinking and writing down ideas, they got into groups of four or five to discuss what they had come up with. The group that I joined focussed on membership size and demographics, community aesthetics, and future goals and projects that Cedar River might work towards. When the entire group came back together to share what each smaller group had come up with, it became apparent that membership size and demographics was a common theme from each smaller discussion. One member brought up the idea of Cedar River becoming a larger 'community' that contained smaller sub-communities of greater cohesion (this may have even been Kate, though I did not note it down at the time).

Another member, Alex, responded that this idea had also been brought up in his group, but people in his group feared that such an arrangement would prohibit members' ability to have a "deep emotional connection" with everyone in the larger community and was thus deemed not viable. This comment suggests to me that the people in Alex's group believed that they must have a "deep emotional connection" with every member of their community in order to fulfil their vision of community. In other words, 'whole persons' must be engaged in order to use the label "community". A bit of discussion ensued, with some suggesting additional alternative views of 'community'. The activity ended with no consensus on the meaning of 'community' being reached.

This scenario is illustrative of the contradictory way in which community was conceived of in relation to selfhood at Cedar River. Even Kate, in the space of less than a minute, expressed first the desire for community based on an experience of the self in relation to the group, and then the desire for community based on a recognition of the self as possessing an essential essence, capable of being loved. So what, then, can an analysis of community tell us about selfhood among intentional

[5] The processes associated with clearing and reconnection are discussed more fully in Chapter Two.

community residents? I am suggesting that analysing the ways in which community is actualised, in relation to how it is conceptualised, in the context of intentional community, allows a particular experience of self to emerge through the illustration of residents' experiences of community. This experience is one in which residents begin to see themselves as part of "an association of people guided by a specific common goal…[that] provides a framework in which [its members] aim to achieve whatever this goal happens to be" (Michael Oakeshott quoted in Robinson 2007:45). In other words, residents begin to understand themselves as connected to each other due to a shared set of values and, thus one recognises oneself as part of a 'context of value', wherein life might be experienced as meaningful (Robinson 2007:45).

Therefore, the remainder of the chapter examines everyday activities that residents associate with community and links these with the continuous process of establishing community through place-making, in order that we might come to know how community is actualised. This type of analysis assumes that residents 'do community'. It also implies that community is experienced in spatial terms, that is, through imagination of and physical presence in a particular place. Of course, I am not suggesting that the experience of community is the same for each resident, as there is clearly not a homogenous understanding of community among residents.

Realising Community in the Eyes of the Community

Due to the fact that intentional community has the act of 'realising' or 'creating' community as one of its goals, discussions such as the one prompted by the 'That's Not Community!' game described above are essential in order to bring to the surface underlying assumptions about how one's acts do or do not demonstrate community in the eyes of fellow community members. If one takes a brief look at the *Communities Directory* (a regularly updated publication/online resource that contains the most comprehensive list of intentional communities worldwide with a descriptive blurb about each), for instance, it will quickly become obvious that there are a multitude of ways in which community is thought to be realised. Various descriptors, such as "income-sharing", "consensus decision-making" "communal meal sharing", indicate ways in which each intentional community listed in the directory realises community.

I am also reminded here of a portion of an interview that I had with Arthur, the organisational coordinator for Cedar River's communally run non-profit business, regarding his process of coming to Cedar River. He related to me how he had made a special trip over the summer prior to actually moving to Cedar River to hear Diana Leafe Christian speak about how community is done. This is significant as Diana Leafe Christian is viewed as somewhat of an authority on intentional community. She has written two best-selling books on joining and creating intentional community, is the former editor of *Communities* magazine, and lives in an intentional community herself.

> "…so I came back essentially to sit-in on 'Community 101' and learn directly from Diana and …so that was the beginning of my training"
>
> (Arthur, Interview, Sept. 5, 2007)

During my time at Cedar River, there was no formal presentation or discussion to which community members were required to attend regarding how one realises community at Cedar River. There was, however, a semi-formal explanation of community that Cedar River subscribed to during the length of my fieldwork. This explanation was presented in a loose format over the course of the community-run Community Orientation Programme (COP). COP was the official gateway into membership at Cedar River during the time of my field work. It was designed to give people an introductory experience to what life might be like in an intentional community, in particular Cedar River. Maryanne was the main organizer of COP. She was responsible for suggesting topics for the curriculum, allocating time slots for each topic, and liaising with the participants of the course before and during the actual week that the course runs. However, the aim of COP was to get as many community members involved as possible so that participants could get to know them, and vice-versa. There were various sessions each day (such as Childcare, Our Vision, Land and Garden, Consensus Decision-making, etc.) that one or more persons associated with the session topic came along to present. During and after presentations, participants were encouraged to ask questions and share their own experiences as they pertained to the topic at hand.

Through the unfolding of these sessions, COP participants were given the opportunity to piece together a picture of community as it was understood to be actualised at Cedar River. The sessions detailed how it was that Cedar River

residents practically went about achieving their mission as a community, and an essential part of this mission was to actualise community. The mission statement, in a condensed form, states that Cedar River will serve as an educational centre that provides living examples of how to exist sustainably within the surrounding ecological and social environment. Presumably most COP participants would have read the mission statement before actually arriving at Cedar River, as the mission statement is a public pronouncement of who Cedar River members are and what they are aiming to do. Nonetheless, the mission statement is quite broad and requires an in-depth explanation of how one's daily activities can and are contributing to the fulfilment of community, among other ideals that are set out in the mission statement. As part of detailing the practical ways in which community was being actualised at Cedar River, all COP participants were given a copy of the "community commitments" which outlined the aspects of community that Cedar River members held central to their cohesiveness as a group. These commitments included, but were not limited to: working agreed "community service hours", participating in meetings, maintaining open and honest relationships with all members, treating children with love and respect, and cleaning up after oneself.

When I say "a semi-formal" explanation in regards to realising community, I refer to the fact that each person that was involved with Cedar River, be they member, intern, or otherwise, brought with them some quality that resulted in community being realised in multiple ways, within the general framework of acceptability outlined by the legal mission statement and "community commitments" discussed above. Furthermore, as was discussed above, community carried multiple meanings for each resident and the shared symbolic form to which community referred at Cedar River was very broad. Most importantly, I am suggesting that community was realised in various ways because community, at least in the intentional sense, is realised through daily activities. In other words, activity is what brings about the structures and forms to which the word community is attached and derives its meaning. Activity, for example, can bring about the quality of sociality that some associate with community, or it can be interpreted as work towards a common social or political concern that a person might feel with their community. It must be noted, however, that the process I am suggesting, one in which daily

activities allow for the experience or realisation of community, involves an element of reflection on the part of residents and the community-as-a-whole, concerning the meaning of community itself.

Realising Community Through Everyday Activities

There existed both semi-formal and completely informal activities through which community was realised daily, and I argue that all were equally important for residents to feel as if community was being actualised. The semi-formal activities ensured that the residents continued to work towards a common goal of community while the informal activities allowed residents to experience community in their own idiosyncratic ways. Therefore, without the regular participation in meetings, work parties, well-being gatherings, and membership reviews, the Cedar River community would be unable to realise their shared goal of community. Similarly, without informal music gatherings, residents' willingness to lend support spontaneously or lunchtime sunbathing gatherings, Cedar River would also be lacking important elements of what it is that community means to its residents.

Each of these activities, in some way, fall under the sense of community that Cedar River members have decided they are striving for, and the more people that are added to the community, the more ways in which community at Cedar River can be realised are invented. Thus, community, as *experienced* at Cedar River, is also best understood by way of Cohen (1985), in that residents' own meanings and values as regards community are worked towards when one is participating in activities that fit into the shared symbolic form that is community at Cedar River, and Rapport (2002), as a concept that is not static and does not have specific tasks associated with its realisation, but as a fluid ideal that is continuously remade through individuals' creativity – their "interpretations and interactions" - in their pursuit of community. The following ethnographic example illustrates my point.

Work Party

Every week, for the duration of my stay at Cedar River, there was a Thursday morning work party, attendance at which was expected for all residents on the property as part of the agreed upon "community service hours" that each resident at Cedar River was asked to subscribe to. The two hours were a time during which general upkeep of property-wide cleanliness was taken care of, for instance cleaning

communal bathrooms, kitchens, dining and lounge spaces. It was also a time during which tasks that needed a large number of people, such as gleaning fruit or firewood from a nearby property or building a new garden fence, could be accomplished. Most tasks were done with a group of two or more people. Residents were given the opportunity to volunteer for the tasks that they were interested in during the brief circle gathering that took place before each work party. The person leading the work party chose, on a first come, first serve basis, the people who would complete each task, and off they went to do their "community service".

It did not take long for me to see the actualisation of community in this weekly gathering. On the most obvious level, the residents were gathering together as a group and making time for announcements and sometimes a short game or meditation before beginning their tasks, which is experienced as a community-building activity. But on a subtler level, each work party participant was taking part in the work party in order to actualise community, in their own idiosyncratic way, through the various tasks required of them, but within the generally accepted framework of "community service". There is no one act that says community for every individual, but through acting in a manner that brings about the aspects of community that the group has agreed are important, one can realise community.

A typical work party experience can be illustrated through an explanation of one such experience, a morning of digging pits in the garden. Myself, Cedric, Marta and Molly were digging these pits so that clay might be soaked in them in preparation for the eco-building project that was part of the upcoming eco-village and permaculture course run at Cedar River. Molly was a land intern, who was seemingly enthusiastic about any hands-on project. Marta was both a childcare and garden intern with a tendency to lend a helping hand. Cedric was part of the infrastructure and maintenance team, and he was particularly interested in eco-building/natural building projects. And I was the anthropologist, happy to pitch in wherever it seemed needed, or interesting, at the time.

The four of us spent the two hours, perhaps a bit more even, digging, talking, laughing, and playing in the clay. We had known each other to varying degrees before this particular morning; however, by the end of the activity we had each learned new things about one another. It was hard work, but the time went by

quickly as we socialised. By partaking in this activity, the residents – Molly, Marta, Cedric and Myself - were not only digging holes for the benefit of the eco-building and completing their weekly work party task, but they were also socialising, sharing skills and gaining practical knowledge about eco-building. This activity, I suggest, in different ways and for different reasons, evoked in each of us an experience of community. Each of us felt that we were realising community precisely because of the context in which we were doing the activity, that of community service, in the form of work party, but also more generally, that of intentional community.

Michael Jackson (1996), in a brief discussion about the need for a more 'anti-intellectualist' approach to anthropological writing, states that "our actions have meaning only in relation to the practical and social life in which we are engaged" (p.4). Simply speaking, because the residents of Cedar River, myself included, were constantly engaged in the practical and social process of community while present on the property by virtue of being intentional community residents, the activities they take part in within that context gain meaning in relation to the overarching goal of community. Therefore, the simple everyday tasks that residents completed as part of the work party every Thursday, for example, were opportunities through which individuals could experience community in a tangible sense. The same activity done outside of Cedar River for the purposes of individual satisfaction, say in one's own backyard, would not carry the same meaning because the context of community is absent. In agreement with Rapport and Amit (2002), I suggest that it is at the intersection of individual activity and the socio-cultural context in which these activities are coordinated, that one can find the existence of community as experienced. Furthermore, it is worth noting that context does not have to be a universally agreed upon setting, but rather a framework within which individuals bring together past experience and present interpretation to create meaning in their socio-cultural world (Rapport 2002).

Consensus Decision-Making

Another way in which community is actualised through everyday activity in intentional community is illustrated by the use of consensus decision-making. As was mentioned above as part of the discussion on different types of intentional

communities, consensus decision-making is one of the defining characteristics of certain intentional communities. There are multiple variations on the actual way to do consensus, but Cedar River has come to agreements about their particular style of consensus decision-making. Meetings are a common, if not everyday, occurrence at Cedar River and most decisions were made through the consensus process that Cedar River members had agreed on (I explain this process in greater depth in Chapter Three). Unlike voting in a majority situation, consensus is an activity that requires knowledge and skills that can only be gained through participation.

At Cedar River, there are formal roles that individuals must volunteer to take on during any consensus process. These roles are that of: facilitator, note-taker, time-keeper, and 'vibes' watcher. Additionally, all other participants in the decision-making process are expected to respect the consensus process by airing their views on the topic at hand if they are pertinent and then being open to hearing and considering the views of others. I am suggesting that through the activity of facilitating or time-keeping, note-taking or participating in general, residents are experiencing a sense of community. True, community members are using consensus to make decisions, but in the context of intentional community the consensus process comes to mean community in the minds of individuals who are taking part in it. This is because, as one community member, Mary, explained it, the consensus process builds trust between residents so that they all might act together as one. By taking part in the consensus process, one is contributing their "piece of the truth" to the whole. If a resident chooses to operate outside the consensus process, which one resident did repeatedly during my fieldwork by altering areas of communal property without seeking communal input, then that individual will eventually fall out of favour as they would be seen to not be participating in the process of community.

Cecilia

One final example is particularly appropriate in demonstrating the point I am trying to make. This is the story of Cecilia, who only lived at Cedar River for a short time during my field work, but remained closely associated through interpersonal relationships for the duration. Cecilia had moved to Cedar River more than a year prior to my arrival in an attempt to make some life changes after experiencing a difficult stage in her marriage. During her time at Cedar River, Cecilia formed close

friendships with many residents, took a permaculture course in order to gain a better understanding of her environment, and generally became an active member of the community. A sudden and life-threatening disease brought Cecilia and her husband back together after Cecilia had been living at Cedar River for just under a year, so they made an agreement to live in the nearby town together and rebuild their relationship, while also remaining close to Cedar River. In fact, Cecilia was the first "urban member" of Cedar River and maintained a small residence on the property when I arrived in September of 2006.

Shortly after my arrival, Cecilia's residence was needed to house residents who would be on the property more often than Cecilia was, and she agreed to give up her residence; however, she still attended the weekly work party and the weekly community-wide meeting. Cecilia explained that this was her way of feeling like she was still part of the community, like she was still realising community. Nevertheless, after less than a month of this arrangement, Cecilia realised that she no longer felt that these activities were providing her with the sense of community she desired. The trip from town and the money she paid to remain a member were no longer worth it to her. Cecilia no longer felt the fulfilment she once did from these activities, as she was no longer in the daily context of community. These activities lost the strength of their associated meanings and became isolated incidents, no longer tied to the daily processes of community.

Place for Community

While community is realised through the activities of residents, processes through which both form and quality are given to social life, community is also conceived of and actualised through the meanings that are attached to the particular place - the land and its surroundings - in which the community exists. It should be noted that it has often been the case with anthropology that ethnographic descriptions of 'place' are simply creations of the anthropologist's making, made for the ease of grounding their depiction in a particular locality (Feld and Basso 1996; Rodman 2003). With intentional community, however, the need to create place artificially, for the purpose of setting, is somewhat less necessary, as intentional communities are constrained to a specific locality by the residents of the community itself. As such, it is less ambiguous in this instance, to talk about place from the perspective of the residents

who inhabit it, as there is an assumed agreement about what does, and does not, constitute the given place.

Of course, this connection, between place and community is not evident for all self-identified communities, and has indeed been assumed wrongfully in many instances (see Rapport and Amit 2002). Nevertheless, in the case of intentional community, I would argue that the physical location of the community itself is intrinsic to the experience people have of community. For many people that I talked with about Cedar River, both residents and non-residents who were familiar with Cedar River, the land and everything on it was synonymous with community. For these people, the community at Cedar River was very much defined by spatial boundaries, or a locality known as such. In this conception, community is *a place*, in other words, Cedar River is community. I am not, however suggesting that this understanding of community and the former conception, wherein community is experienced via certain activities, are mutually exclusive; rather, that they are different ways in which residents of Cedar River came to know, interpret, and create community.

The anthropological exploration of landscape proves useful for understanding how social meaning is attached to the physical environment inhabited by any particular group of people at a given time. In this case, we are concerned with how the physical environment, *the place*, where the intentional community of Cedar River exists, takes on meaning as community for its inhabitants. Hirsch, in the introduction to *The Anthropology of Landscape: perspectives on place and space*, puts forward the notion that 'landscape', in an anthropological sense, should be thought of as a cultural process that is an ongoing negotiation between everyday social activity and potential sociality of a given place (1995: 22 - 23). In other words, to more fully understand the quality of a given landscape, one must both consider the everyday social life of the place, as well as the imagined social potential of the space. Analysed from this perspective, I argue that Cedar River comes to be understood as a place for community in two ways: first, by being *perceived* as an ideal setting for community and second, by being *experienced* as a place of community.

The Ideal Setting

Cedar River, like most physical locations that come under the protection of a recognised state, has legally defined boundaries and a set number of acres within which the land is maintained by Cedar River residents. The region where Cedar River is located is dominated by spectacularly tall cedar and fir trees, grown lush and old in the fertile lands of the Cascadian foothills.

Much of this forest has been made available to logging and has therefore become a contested landscape where corporations, the state, environmental groups and other individuals fight for control over the future of the land. Within Cedar River's boundaries, however, the loggers have no access and the management of the land rests in the hands of the community appointed land steward.

The land itself is a patchwork of diverse ecosystems, some managed by human intervention, some left to the devices of nature. Old growth forest mixes with newly regenerated forest, as well as a large meadow that blooms with native wildflowers, to create a natural beauty breathtaking for anyone who has the slightest inclination towards a love of the outdoors. A rushing creek that swells and shrinks with the seasons runs through the land, adding to the beauty and providing much needed refreshment in the hottest days of summer.

Small cabins and a few larger buildings are dotted through the forest on one edge of the property, while a large, yet unobtrusive structure sits close to the meadow, not far from the others. These buildings are the main concentration of human habitation on the property, where action is always visible; however, outside these clusters of buildings, there are gardens and nature trails, temporary dwellings and secret hideaways where individuals might be found.

The impressive quality of the landscape at Cedar River was not lost on many who set foot on the land. I often heard visitors and residents alike commenting on how

incredible the physical environment was within the boundaries of the intentional community. In fact, Cedar River could easily be described as the *ideal* setting for any rural community.

In suggesting that Cedar River is conceived of as community by virtue of it being an ideal setting for community, I am not only suggesting that there is a common notion among *rural* intentional community seekers as to what is an ideal community setting, but also by implication, that there is a setting which, in contrast, is not ideal for, or does not support, community. The notion comes from a distinctly Western nostalgia for the untouched landscapes and quaint villages of an idealised past where people supposedly lived communally. This idealised setting is a kind of "Return to Eden" where the land can provide for all of one's needs and individuals live in harmony with each other and their surroundings. In contrast, the setting which is all too familiar to the average middle class person in the United States at present is the modern, individualised urban or suburban development seen as lacking the qualities for supporting community. The following excerpt from an interview with Frank, a middle-aged resident of approximately one year at the time of our interview, illustrates this viewpoint:

> **Me:** What inspired you to move into community in the first place?
>
> **Frank:** …I'm seeing how the American way of life is so destructive and detrimental to the health of the planet and the health of society. I just realised that society was just going in this destructive direction and I didn't see any… it just seemed like it was this downhill spiral of going nowhere and doing all the wrong things. Human beings have lived communally from day one. It's just been since The Industrial Revolution basically…about that time…that people have started being more individualistic and, you know, they want their own little house and basically trying to be like the king…In the United States we developed our capitalist elite and all that and people wanted to be like that. So everybody wanted their own mansion, have their own house and their own space and we started moving away from this communal way of living and I think that's about the time when we really started going in this…even a more self destructive direction. And, I just really didn't want to be a part of the problem anymore. I saw all these bad things happening and I couldn't support it…I couldn't stomach to support it anymore. And I felt very strongly about going back to the old ways that have worked for thousands of years.
>
> **Me:** Meaning?

> **Frank:** Communal living, you know…Just from a social organisational standpoint with communal living part of that. Taking care of the planet. It's much more sustainable when folks work together and share things together and live off the land more and concentrate on supporting their local communities more. And that's what I really liked about communal living, was all of those things.
>
> (Interview Aug. 31, 2007)

This dialectic sets up one framework within which we can understand how meaning and value comes to be attached to a particular landscape, such as the one that currently encompasses Cedar River (Selwyn 1995).

Precisely what, we might ask, about Cedar River's setting contributes to residents' understanding of Cedar River as an ideal setting for community? When I put a similar question to Dan, Cedar River's land steward and someone who had been involved with Cedar River for nearly the duration of its existence, he responded with the following:

> By and large, people like the environment. They like the scale of it…By the environment, I mean that people really appreciate that this is a very green, high fractal, low stress environment.
>
> (Dan, Interview Sept. 6, 2007)

Dan went on to describe how, in contrast, during his last visit to one of the nearby cities, with all the noise, large buildings that block sunlight and lack of open space, he was struck by the recognition that he could no longer consider a place like that somewhere to live.

Furthermore, because Cedar River sits on nearly ninety acres of land, approximately 20 miles from the nearest city, there is ample room for community-sustaining enterprises on the land. As such, some portion of the food consumed by residents is grown on the land by residents, much of the wastewater from showers, sinks, toilets, etc. is pumped back onto the land (far away from human habitation) to be filtered by biological organisms, and the forest serves as a personal nature reserve to be used for hiking, wildlife watching or photography by any resident. Thus, Cedar River's landscape is reminiscent of that of the self-sustaining, rural community of Redfield's (1960) depiction.

Finally, as I described above, most of the dwellings designed and used for human habitation were concentrated on one small area of the land. This feature of Cedar River's landscape fed into residents' understanding of Cedar River as an ideal

setting for community due to the fact that it encouraged a type of 'market square' sociality on a daily basis. This part of Cedar River was the centre of action and was often relied upon by residents as a space for meeting with others, hearing the daily news and generally getting involved in whatever might be happening for the day. Residents often told me that the kitchen/dining/living space building that sat at the centre of the area I am referring to could always be counted on to meet their social needs, and that aspect of living on Cedar River land, alone, gave them an experience of community.

Belonging to Place and Calling it Home

Additionally, Cedar River, as a place, took on the form of community for many of its residents through the meanings they attached to the experiences they had once they arrived there (See Feld and Basso 1996). This is most evident in the processes of collective identity formation, particularly as they relate to residents' feelings of belonging at Cedar River. Lovell (1998) notes that "belonging is…fundamentally defined through a sense of experience … which serves to create, mould and reflect perceived ideals surrounding place (p.1). Similarly, Leach (2005) suggests that feelings of belonging to a place arise out of repeated "performance" in a given locality. In this, Leach is using Butler's notion of 'performativity' which claims that "it is precisely our actions and behaviour that constitute our identity" (2005: 285). Applying Butler to a theory of belonging to place, therefore, is suggesting that, through performing various tasks with a group of people calling themselves a community in a particular location, meaning is given to place.

If we again consider the notion of boundary-making (Cohen 1982, 1985), but this time in relation to collective identity formation and feelings of belonging, it becomes clear that it is at the moment of each resident's initial decision to move to Cedar River that identification with the group begins. Similar to the Glastonbury New Agers Prince and Riches study (1999, 2000), Cedar River residents held at least one aspect of identity in common, being that they chose to reject, at least in part, the "social circumstances of the wider mainstream Euro-American society" and wound up choosing Cedar River as a place to reside (1999:107). The processes of collective identity formation, however, are reinforced through the daily performances of residents living in group form, such as those described above and others which are

addressed in greater detail in the following chapters, thus contributing to growing feelings of belonging.

For those who reside at Cedar River for some length of time, the experience of collective identity and belonging to the group becomes grounded in place, and Cedar River becomes 'home'. 'Home' is the place "where a person feels rooted, whether the roots are distant in time or recently sunk" (Blu 1996). I argue that as residents come to identify Cedar River with 'home', they come to understand where they live as *their* community. In the following excerpt from an interview with one Cedar River resident, I have asked the respondent, Burke, how he thinks about Cedar River as a place and I offer a few suggestions – community, educational centre or non-profit. In answering my question, Burke takes community to mean 'home'; and 'home' is tied up with everything else that Burke understands Cedar River to be.

> **Me:** When you think about this place, do you see it as: "Cedar River is this community that I live in" or do you think more like "Cedar River is this educational centre that I live at" or do you think "Well, I live in a non-profit"?
>
> **Burke:** Well, I notice when I'm talking to the outside world about [Cedar River], I get really excited. And it's like, I talk about my home and what amazing work we're doing in the world, which I totally believe that we are through the permaculture and eco-village design courses that we're doing. And through the [personal growth course]… So, as you said that, I noticed that I felt like "Yeah, I feel all three of those things. Yeah we are a non-profit and I'm excited to say that and I'm excited to say that this is my home and I'm excited to say that I work at an educational centre." I think the fact of this being my home kind of outweighs the other two, though.
>
> (Interview Sept. 7, 2007)

Referring back to Leach (2005), he suggests that it is in moments such as the one Burke describes, where "we effectively see ourselves in objects with which we have become familiar", that identification occurs (p.291). Therefore, through engaging in the daily activities that come along with living at Cedar River, and associating the place and the people with home, Burke has identified Cedar River as *his* community. In other words, Burke is suggesting that he identifies with the moral or ethical traditions embodied by Cedar River and thus it becomes a "community-as-context-of-value" (Robinson 2007:45). Being recognised as a "community-as-context-of-value" is significant, Robinson claims, as it is within just such a context that

individuals and groups are able to best formulate their conceptions of the common good and work towards the goals that relate to those goods (2007:45-46).

Conclusion

This thesis conceives of intentional community as a site where certain 'alternative' or 'sub-cultural' values, beliefs and morals are actualised, both individually and as a group, through which those involved experience their lives as meaningful. Due to the nature of Cedar River as a self-identified intentional community, the project of realising community is of central importance to both residents and the community-as-a whole. Therefore, the present chapter was concerned with understanding how community is both understood and realised by residents of Cedar River. I suggested that community is understood by residents to be both a group formation that exists in a particular locality and a quality of social life among residents.

More importantly, I have argued that community is experienced by residents through partaking in everyday activity in the context of intentional community, which also leads to identification with the physical place that is Cedar River. For residents of Cedar River, taking part in activities, such as weekly work parties and consensus decision-making meetings, is an opportunity to experience community, be it their own idiosyncratic conception of community or one that is sanctioned by the group. Additionally, community is realised by residents via the complementary process of conceptualising the landscape of Cedar River as the ideal setting for community, particularly in opposition to the realities of Western suburban and urban settings, and experiencing their lives at Cedar River as analogous to 'home'. As residents begin to identify with the land and the group, Cedar River becomes a "context of value" (Robinson 2007: 45–46) for its residents, and this experience of community is a setting within which lives are able to be experienced as meaningful.

Chapter Two

Intimacy as Central to Sociality: Negotiating Interpersonal Relationships

In Chapter One, I explored the concept of 'community' and sought to illuminate the ways in which it was actualised at Cedar River. I did so in order to demonstrate how certain everyday activities, construed as instances of 'community', become practical avenues through which residents come to identify with, and be identified with, a "context of value", thus contributing to the experience of leading a meaningful life. In this chapter, I build on the theme of experiencing life as meaningful by examining the nature of interpersonal relationships at Cedar River. I suggest that, first and foremost, some level of intimacy is strived for in all interpersonal relationships at Cedar River and therefore its attainment is understood as a central social process. By analysing the ways in which residents enact intimacy with one another, I further suggest that interpersonal relationships at Cedar River ultimately provide a challenge to normative, or mainstream, beliefs relating to friendship, familial relations, sex and sexuality. The analysis inevitably requires some explanation of how the notion of 'self', in relation to 'other', was being conceptualised by residents.

The valuing of intimacy is indicative of a communal emphasis on the *quality* of interpersonal relationality in sociality, as opposed to the *rules and regulations that govern* interpersonal relations in a structural model of society. This, I argue, is a key issue if we wish to grasp how everyday interactions among Cedar River residents are infused with values and beliefs that might be considered 'alternative' (in comparison to those which popularly circulate among urban and suburban industrial Americans) and are thus the product of intentional re-ordering. Additionally, the placement of intimacy as central to sociality suggests some attempt by Cedar River residents to address a perceived lack of intimacy among members of the American mainstream, as well as an intentional negotiation of the relationship between public and private spheres in daily life. Furthermore, the discussion throughout this chapter suggests that the communal emphasis placed on intimacy in interpersonal relationship is directly related to the functioning of Cedar River's chosen organisational model

which, as we will see in Chapter Three, requires the "socioregulatory mechanism" (Trigger 2006: 25) of intimacy to maintain support for its underlying values.

Intimate Encounters

At least once a week, for the majority of my time at Cedar River, I was called on to have an intimate encounter with several community residents in a structured and public manner. This encounter took place in the context of an activity known as "milling". Though I do not know the origins of the activity, or even if it was developed at Cedar River, milling was introduced to me, and most other community residents, through the personal growth programme run by Cedar River. The weekly milling that I refer to, however, took place during the first ten to fifteen minutes of the community-wide decision-making meeting.

It was not compulsory to attend the before-meeting milling, though it was certainly noticed by a number of community members if one was regularly absent. In general, when asked, residents told me that they welcomed the opportunity to connect with others during millings and other milling-type practices. However, some residents did express that they did not consider it a priority to attend the before-meeting millings as they felt that there were both other opportunities throughout the day to connect with fellow residents and more important things to do with one's time during the workday. Notably, not one resident ever expressed a downright dislike or distrust of millings; rather, residents' opinions relating to the desire to participate in millings were expressed in degrees of significance. For myself, I attended as much as was required to remain seemingly involved in the eyes of those who appeared to take stock of such matters, but always felt some resistance to the idea of what I perceived as forced intimacy.

A milling began when the milling facilitator instructed those who were participating to "become aware of your breath" and bring oneself "present". This instruction was generally followed by some verbal guidance on how to do so. Participants were often encouraged to clear their minds of thoughts, if only momentarily, and tune in to what might be happening in their bodies. Sometimes participants were encouraged to notice what thoughts persisted in running through their minds. Always, participants were reminded to breathe fully. It might be suggested that this part of the milling process was a preparation of sorts. In other

words, before one could begin to be intimate with others, s/he must first become intimate with him/herself.

After a couple of minutes of breathing and becoming "present" with oneself, participants were asked to walk up to another person, hold hands with them if it felt comfortable, look into each other's eyes and, either share something that will help oneself to become present with that person, or listen to what that person shares. The facilitator reminds the participants that they are not expected to respond to whatever their partner shares, however they must find some way of acknowledging their partner, perhaps with a "thank you", and ending the encounter, usually by way of a hug. Then, each participant is asked to repeat the activity with another person until the facilitator announces that the milling has ended.

The scene of this activity - a group of anywhere from six to thirty people *milling* around a lounge room (this is presumably the origin of the activity's name), randomly pairing up, holding hands, making eye contact, stating some inner thought or feeling, hugging and repeating the process with the next person - is not exactly the sort of picture the average person living in a Western context brings to mind when imagining the start of a meeting. One might imagine something similar - meeting participants in an average American context, for instance, will often wander around prior to the start of official proceedings, perhaps shake hands with or hug other participants in greeting, and catch up with others on the latest news or exchange some pleasantries - however, I would venture to say that the image of a typical meeting in an American context would not be one associated with displays of intimacy (See Kilpatrick 1975 for instance), which the Cedar River activity clearly is.

This bit of ethnography, then, is instructive, as it begins to build a picture of what interpersonal relationships might look like if intimacy, rather than social structure, is central to sociality. Milling, as I argue later on in the chapter, is an example of a socially-sanctioned regular activity through which an ethic of intimacy in interpersonal relations is nurtured and encouraged. Furthermore, it is one practice through which the relationship of 'presumed friendship' (which I define further on as a distinct type of friendship, most notably due to its public nature) is perpetuated. More importantly, however, the milling ethnography exemplifies some of the

tensions that arise from attempting to make intimacy a social convention. Most obviously, as is suggested through my own discomfort with the practice, is that intimacy is generally understood, in a Western context, to be something of a private encounter; and with milling, intimacy becomes public, in the sense that it is part of the realm of sociability. This, as I implied above, appeared to be less of an issue for the residents than it was for myself. Additionally, and perhaps more significantly, if one chose not to take part in milling on a regular basis, it might be argued that such a person was no longer committed to the communal ideals associated with interpersonal relationships, and thus said individual might become increasingly viewed with suspicion. The remainder of the chapter goes on to explore these ideas in greater depth by placing milling, and other such practices, into the context of larger community beliefs, values and morals related to interpersonal relationships.

The Concept of Intimacy

Intimacy, in popular Western thought, has come to be associated with the "disclosure" of oneself to one's equal, which over time is thought to create deep levels of trust and a shared knowledge of each other (Giddens 1992; Prager 1997; Jamieson 1998). Additionally, intimacy is thought to be reserved for only the closest of relationships. In short, Giddens (1999) defines intimacy as "emotional communication" and suggests that intimacy pertains to three main arenas of our "personal lives": sexuality and love, parent-child relations and friendship (p.4).

However, this was not always the case, as Zeldin (1991:324-329) makes clear throughout his meditations on intimacy. Intimacy's current place in Western sociality is a product of historical attitudes towards the self and the very nature of intimacy as it relates to emotion, arising during the Romantic period and continuing to influence our perception of interpersonal relationships in the present moment. Nevertheless, most anthropological and sociological texts that explore or use the concept of intimacy do so in reference to one's "personal life" (Paine 1969; Jamieson 1998; Giddens 1999). Consequently, the study of intimacy has been relegated to friendship, kinship relations, and sexual relations - all three of which are assumed to be of a 'personal' and, in a Western context, 'private' nature (Paine 1969:513) - suggesting that intimacy is something that is thought to occur only in private settings.

Indeed, the political/social theorist Jeff Weintraub captures this sentiment precisely in his discussion of the public/private dichotomy in Western thought:

> The public/private distinction is … used as a conceptual framework for demarcating … important boundaries: between the "private" worlds of intimacy and the family and the "public" worlds of sociability or the market economy.
>
> (Weintraub 1997:2)

And yet, for the folks at Cedar River, intimacy was at the very core of sociality. In both the mission statement under which Cedar River was incorporated as a non-profit educational centre and the list of community commitments that each resident was asked to agree to, phrases such as "deepening relationships", "clear, open and honest communication", "sharing" and "support" feature in explanations of what community life at Cedar River aims to be. Furthermore, each community resident was encouraged to attend (at least once) the personal growth course offered at Cedar River which taught, as one of its primary objectives, individuals to "become present" with others. In other words, course participants were encouraged to reveal themselves physically, mentally and emotionally to other participants in the belief that doing so allows one to experience a greater sense of fulfilment from the relationships with those around you. Thus, intimacy was not only encouraged at the start of community-wide meetings (as was illustrated with the milling exercise above), it was strived for in nearly all interpersonal exchanges that occurred throughout the day, be they of a 'public' or 'private' nature. Put another way, residents who were in right relation to one another, no matter what arena of life they were operating in, were in intimate relation to one another.

As is elaborated on in the remainder of this chapter, Cedar River residents' focus on intimacy in everyday interpersonal relations suggests:

- A critique, by the residents of Cedar River, of mainstream American culture due to a perceived lack of intimacy in everyday social interactions
- It also highlights the ways in which the relationships between public and private spheres were being negotiated in daily life as part of the intention of the community

- Moreover, a communal focus on intimacy becomes a way of challenging normative, or mainstream, beliefs and values regarding friendship, love, familial relations, sex and sexuality

Conceptualising the 'Self'

Before moving forward in the analysis of interpersonal relationships at Cedar River, it is necessary to consider how residents were conceptualising the 'self' that is involved in these relationships, as intimacy generally connotes some "disclosure of the self" (Jamieson 1998). If we think back to the "milling" activity described above, certain beliefs become apparent. The instructions given to participants at the beginning of the activity, that is, becoming aware of one's breath and bringing oneself present, are both concepts derived from gestalt therapy, upon which much of the personal growth course run at Cedar River was based.

Gestalt therapy sees the "human being as part of an organism/environment field, a dynamic web of interconnections from which each self emerges… gestalt theory define[s] self as the integrative function of this organism/environment field" (Yontef 2005: 2). According to gestalt theory, therefore, the self is understood to be fluid and relational, always seeking to integrate what one is experiencing in relation to their environment. To request that one focus on one's breath and bring one's 'self' present in this context, then, is to call on one to identify with what one is experiencing, both in their body and their mind, at the present moment. Furthermore, to request that a person become present with another person is to ask each person to attempt to identify with the emergent experience of 'the other' (ibid).

The conceptualisation of the self as fluid and relational is quite similar to the postmodern conceptualisation described in great detail in Gergen's (1991) *The Saturated Self*. According to Gergen, conceiving of one's self in this manner is the product of a postmodern consciousness, arising from "social saturation", and leading to a condition wherein "we see the demise of personal definition, reason, authority, commitment, trust, the sense of authenticity, sincerity, belief in leadership, depth of feeling and faith in progress" (1991:228). While Gergen freely admits that he views the transition towards understanding the self from a postmodern consciousness in a fairly negative light, he does see a few positive potentials resulting from this view of

the self. One is that the Western preoccupation with the 'individual' will give way to a more inclusive focus on the communal or social needs (p.239–245).

While I am not aware that Cedar River residents, in general, were well-versed in gestalt, or for that matter postmodern, theory, I am suggesting that it is likely the case that developing a communal language and practice that conceptualises the self in this relational manner was seen as necessary for building a group focus and identity. Of course, as Gergen (1991) also points out, while a move toward an understanding of the self as fluid and relational may be evident, there still exists both the cultural vocabulary and cognitive patterning, developed in both the romantic and modern traditions, which lends itself toward conceptualisations of self as containing some essential core or essence. I am therefore not suggesting a complete and total shift to the conceptualisation of the self as fluid and relational among Cedar River residents, but rather a movement towards such a conceptualisation in the belief that it might aid the communal valuing of social processes over structure.

Intimacy as Central to Sociality

According to the norms of modern Western thought, sociality - meaning the various processes that shape social life (Bauman 2004:22) - is not usually centred on intimacy (Overing 1989; Johnson 2005). Traditionally, Western thought, even anthropological thought, has tended to view sociality in terms of structure and the rules than govern it (For example, see Overing and Passes 2000 for a discussion). As such, people are thought to relate to one another through roles, defined either by age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or some alternative identification with a particular social grouping. Victor Turner (1969) famously addressed the concept of "social structure" in *The Ritual Process*, suggesting that a dialectic relationship exists in any society between *two* social forms, that of structure and that of a so-called anti-structure. Anti-structure, which emerges in the form of *communitas*, is characterised by intense feelings of social togetherness. Thus, in the absence of structure, according to Turner, a certain *quality* of inter-relatedness becomes the defining feature of sociality. Nevertheless, it remains the case that, according to mainstream Western norms, sociality is conceived of via structural relationships, rather than through the quality of those relationships (Prince and Riches 2000: 113-114).

However, I am suggesting that such was not the case at Cedar River. At Cedar River, relationships were first and foremost expected to be grounded in a sense of intimacy so that residents were able to be clear with one another about their internal thoughts, intentions and emotional responses regarding any given situation. Social roles were of little to no consequence in daily interactions among residents. As one resident, Burke, stated, "Age, or race, or sex or whatever is not really a focus here, which I really enjoy 'cause that really gives freedom to be exactly how you want to be" (Interview Sept. 7, 2007). Social structure was neither a given, nor easily discernable at Cedar River[6], and thus alternatively, as was stated in the introduction to this chapter, the *quality* of interpersonal relations was placed at the centre of sociality.

A distinction must be made, however, between ideals and actuality in relation to sociality at Cedar River. In practice, achieving the ideal level of intimacy with all residents was virtually impossible. As Roger, a long term community member, told me when I asked him if his way of relating to other residents had changed over the years of his residency, "I guess there was an expectation that you would try to get clear with everybody and as the size of the community grew, that kind of intimacy between everybody just became unrealistic probably" (Interview Sept. 2, 2007). Yet, the *ethic* of intimacy as central to interpersonal relationships still existed and was perpetuated in certain regular activities such as:

- millings
- check-ins, a regularly occurring activity in which residents, or anybody who might be participating, were encouraged to share with the group a brief overview of how they were feeling, what was on their mind, or anything else that might help them to be clear and honest about their present state with the other participants
- and clearings, an activity in which residents sought to "clear up" issues with one another through open and honest communication

Prince and Riches (2000) found the state of affairs among the Alternative Community in Glastonbury to be quite similar in that "what an anthropologist would

[6] In Chapter 3 I discuss what occurred, and how this affected the nature of sociality, when an obvious structure began to emerge at Cedar River.

call ‘social structure’ [was] hard to discern” (2000:113). Rather, New Agers in Glastonbury interacted as “whole persons”, allowing for social roles to be cast aside or “de-signified” in everyday interpersonal relations (p. 116-117). Consequently, they make the suggestion that New Age persons and social relationships are infused with a certain “moral quality”, related to the New Agers’ belief that humans are inherently social beings, which makes them distinct from those of the Western mainstream wherein humans are thought to be individuated in relation to other humans (p.113-134). Thus, Prince and Riches conclude that the New Agers at Glastonbury choose to formulate sociality in the way that they do in order to express their dislike of the perceived ills of mainstream individualism (p.243). In other words, the lack of a discernable social structure among the Alternative Community in Glastonbury presents itself as a critique of mainstream sociality, and that critique is aimed specifically at the role that individuality plays in the structuring of Western mainstream social processes.

I, too, am suggesting that the residents of Cedar River are aiming a critique at the mainstream through their lack of a discernable social structure; however, I am suggesting that their critique is specifically associated with a perceived lack of intimacy among members of the mainstream, as evidenced through the intentional structuring of intimacy in practices such as milling, and many of the other exercises that made up the personal growth courses, as well as the focus placed on the nurturing of interpersonal relationships in ‘official’ documents such as the mission statement and community commitments. Therefore, by claiming that sociality among Cedar River residents is centred on intimacy (i.e. a quality of interpersonal relationships), rather than structure, I aim to emphasize the point that everyday interpersonal relations among Cedar River residents are infused with values and beliefs that are ‘alternative’ (in comparison to those which popularly circulate among urban and suburban industrial Americans) and are thus the product of intentional re-ordering.

A comparison with Overing and Passes (2000) edited collection on Amazonian sociality is also instructive here. They describe a situation wherein a societal focus on “moral virtues and the aesthetics of interpersonal relations” suggests quite a different framework for imagining the realm of the social (2000: 7).

Overing and Passes, and the contributors to their volume, have chosen the word "conviviality" to describe sociality among Amazonian peoples (2000). They have done so in order to stress, what is in their interpretation, the Amazonian societal focus on all aspects of collective living, combined with an emphasis on egalitarianism and a selection of qualities which they deem specific to the "Native context" such as peacefulness, high affectivity, and a weighty valuing of "sociable sociality" (Overing and Passes 2000: xiii – xiv). Furthermore, they do so because they argue that simply speaking of an Amazonian sociality fails to recognise the explicit evocation of harmonious, intimate interaction in Amazonian everyday interactions, which is, the authors stress, clearly part of the Amazonian ideal of 'the good life' (2000).

While sociality at Cedar River clearly has aspects in common with this interpretation of Amazonian sociality, I am not suggesting that the two are the same. Instead, I merely wish to illustrate, through drawing a parallel with Amazonian ethnography, which Overing et.al. (2000) plainly state requires one to rethink the realm of the social, how the specificity of intentionally placing intimacy at the centre of sociality affects the ways in which residents came to conceptualise and negotiate all interpersonal relationships. This leads us to consider the types of relationships residents took part in and how they are distinct from similar types of relationships among mainstream Americans as a result of sociality being centred on an ethic of intimacy at Cedar River. In the next section, I suggest that residents engaged in relationships of 'presumed friendship', wherein they enacted what we in the West consider to be friendship relations, yet they differed in that they were neither limited to a select few, nor peripheral to the functioning of society, nor, most importantly, 'private'.

Public Friendships, Meaningful Experiences

Friendship, within anthropology, has recently been identified as a problematic term which is used to speak of a variety of different types of relationship, yet also assumes certain modern Western-centric qualities which limits the term's use to particular forms (Paine 1969; Gilmore 1975; Uhl 1991; Bell and Coleman 1999). Furthermore, it has been noted that friendship, as a focus of study, has often been pushed aside in favour of kinship due to the assumption that friendship does not serve a central role

in the functioning of society (Gilmore 1975; Uhl 1991; Bell and Coleman 1999; Risseeuw 2010). Friendship is commonly thought to denote a type of voluntary and personal relationship, limited to a select few (Paine 1969; Uhl 1991) in which trust and affection are core elements (Bell and Coleman 1999). Additionally, in a Western context, friendship is thought of as a 'private' relationship generally due to the levels of intimacy friendship seems to entail (Paine 1969; Gilmore 1975; Uhl 1991; Risseeuw 2010).

To a large extent, the interpersonal relationships between residents of Cedar River appear to fit the above stated criteria for friendship. As described earlier on, relationships at Cedar River are first and foremost meant to be based on "clear, open and honest communication" and, as is described in greater detail in Chapter 6, trust. Furthermore, they are affective. As one long-term resident, Roger, expressed in relation to what he enjoyed most about living at Cedar River: "There is so much good spirit and so much affection expressed between people… There's a lot of love here, which is really what it's all about" (Interview Sept. 2, 2007). Finally, they are personal in the sense that the relationships occur "between particular individuals" (Paine 1969:513).

However, I am suggesting that, due to the fact that intimacy has been placed at the centre of sociality, there is a distinct type of friendship that existed between residents which I have called 'presumed friendship'. Presumed friendship is distinct in that it is neither reserved for a select few (i.e. it is ideally shared between all residents and many visitors), nor is it peripheral to the functioning of Cedar River as a whole (Cedar River's chosen organisational model, as we will see in Chapter Three, requires the "socioregulatory mechanism" (Trigger 2006: 25) of intimacy, enacted through 'presumed friendship', to maintain support for its underlying values), nor is it 'private' (as I will go on to demonstrate). Moreover, it is 'presumed' because it is taken for granted that friendship will exist due to the association made by residents between the rhetoric used in the community commitments and organisational mission statement, the regular practices, such as millings, that encourage disclosure of the self, and the mainstream definition of friendship as something that results from the processes above. To clarify, this does not mean that friendships in the typical Western sense did not also exist at Cedar

River, but rather that the intimacy ethic, or generalised intimacy, to which residents subscribed, created an additional type of relationship between residents.

Prince and Riches (2000) mention a similar phenomenon among the New Agers in Glastonbury which they term 'instant friendship'. Analogous to what I have just described, Prince and Riches claim that "[u]pon first meeting, people would presume immediately that the crucial values of trust and affect held between them" and, thus, they would become 'instant friends' (2000:116). This was expressed, they suggest, most pointedly in the use of a hug for greeting, rather than a handshake. However, Prince and Riches also claim that 'instant friendship' is a private relationship "in that what [individuals] choose to disclose to one another is a matter solely for the people concerned", even though it might very well be disclosed rapidly and be of an intimate nature (2000:121). It is on this point that I wish to suggest that 'instant friendship' differs from 'presumed friendship'. Presumed friendship, I am arguing, is not entirely private, due to the fact that the practices which establish the relationship are of a public nature. In other words, practices such as millings, clearings and the general commitment residents make to be open and honest, fall into the realm of sociality at Cedar River and are thus to be considered a public matter (Weintraub 1997:2, 19). In contrast to what Paine sees as one of the defining features of a private relationship, Cedar River residents are, to some degree, instructed as to how to make their relationships with fellow residents (1969:513).

In calling the 'presumed friendship' relationship between residents 'public', I merely wish to illustrate the point that, by placing intimacy at the centre of sociality at Cedar River, residents were attempting to place what is ordinarily associated with private relationships into the realm of the public. Again, this is suggesting that Cedar River residents were attempting to critique mainstream notions in regards to intimacy, or a lack thereof; however, it goes a step farther in that it suggests that Cedar River residents were actually challenging mainstream beliefs and values in regards to interpersonal relationships.

This point can be illustrated more easily if we consider the history of the Western distinction between 'public' and 'private' realms. The following excerpt taken from Jeff Weintraub's *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy* sums up the relevant details concisely:

> Ariès, Norbert Elias, and Foucault were all, in different ways, exploring the same broad historico-theoretical terrain: the triumph of privacy and discipline in the modern West. The composite picture of the historical transformation of Western societies that has emerged from these different lines of research emphasizes, albeit in different ways, the breakdown of the older "public" realm of polymorphous sociability and, with it, the sharpening polarization of social life between an increasingly impersonal "public" realm (of the market, the state, and bureaucratic organization) and a "private" realm of increasingly intense intimacy and emotionality (the modern family, romantic love and so forth).
>
> (Weintraub 1997:20)

Thus, in suggesting that Cedar River residents were challenging mainstream beliefs and values related to interpersonal relationships by placing intimacy at the centre of sociality, I am suggesting that they were attempting to both bring intimacy back into the realm of 'public' affairs through the relationship of 'presumed friendship' so as to overcome the impersonality of bureaucratic organisation (a point which I expand on in greater detail in Chapter Three), as well as diffuse the intensity of modern familial, love and sexual relationships by moving intimacy away from strictly 'private' relations (as I will explore further in the following sections).

Another helpful comparison can be made here. David Gilmore (1975) studied friendship in Fuenmayor, a rural community in southern Spain. He speaks of three different levels of friendship among villagers: the first being public in nature and occurring between peers, the second being somewhere in-between public and private and occurring between households, and the third being of a private nature and occurring between individuals (1975:312). Gilmore suggests that the three levels of friendship lead into one another and work to both stave off atomistic isolation and create ideal personality types among villagers. In particular, he claims that the fluidity that is evident between the three types of friendship encourages individuals to "institutionalize their deepening intimacy by proceeding conventionally from one pattern to the next" (p.322), thus moving from the public realm of "casual friendship", wherein certain socially-sanctioned practices take place in order to encourage camaraderie, to the private realm of "confianza" wherein "there is an unqualified "opening" of the heart to a close friend, a voluntary and unreserved surrender of the concealed private sphere of life" (p.317). Finally, Gilmore suggests that the movement from casual friendships to *confianza* allows individuals to "bridge the conceptual gap between public and private realms" (p.322).

While there are clearly some differences between Gilmore's ethnography and that of Cedar River (primarily in that the casual friendship that Gilmore describes is supposedly lacking in trust), the comparison is instructive as it suggests another level of reasoning behind residents' decision to challenge mainstream understandings of interpersonal relationships by placing intimacy at the centre of sociality. Namely, that by doing so, residents are contributing to their experience of meaningful life construction. This is due to the fact that residents are able to experience more fluidity between their 'private' and 'public' selves, as the public self which is nurtured and idealised at Cedar River is not dissimilar to the otherwise recognised private (open, honest) self. As Peter Berger describes, one result of the segregation in modern Western society between 'public' and 'private' spheres is that "[t]he private sphere has served as a kind of balancing mechanism providing meanings and meaningful activities to compensate for the discontents brought about by the large structures of modern society" (Berger 1974:185-186 quoted in Weintraub 1997:21). Thus, if intimacy becomes a part of everyday sociality, i.e. part of the realm of the 'public', life can be experienced as meaningful more of the time, even as residents move through different levels of intimacy with one another.

Of course, it would be naïve to suggest that the transition between understanding intimacy as something reserved for 'private' relations, to that of understanding intimacy as central to sociality, was a smooth and uncomplicated one; particularly as it was not only the mainstream norms relating to friendship that were being challenged at Cedar River, but also those relating to family, love, sex and sexuality. In line with the beliefs of theorists such as Giddens (1992, 1999), Cedar River residents were seemingly attempting to address the individualising forces of modern American society by emphasising intimacy through disclosure of the self; yet, they were doing so in ways that force us to question our understandings of what constitutes different types of relationships in a Western setting. Additionally, Cedar River residents were experimenting with the socialisation of other forms of intimacy, such as physical intimacy, which, among members of the mainstream society, is often thought of as reserved for kinship or sexual relations.

In the remainder of this chapter, I illustrate how the intimacy ethic held by residents of Cedar River had an impact on familial, love and sexual relationships

there. I suggest that the challenge that residents were posing to normative values also caused much confusion, jealousy and fear between residents. This, I argue, is due to the fact that intimacy is closely linked with ideas about love, family, sex and sexuality among most Americans and thus there is room for much uncertainty and confusion as to the bounds of intimacy as a social ethic, especially in a community that is small enough that residents were involved in a multitude of different types of relationships with everyone else.

Let's Talk About Sex

According to the mission statement, upon being accepted as part of the community, Cedar River residents agreed that they would not discriminate on the basis of sexual preference or gender identity. Cedar River also identified as an inclusive community, in terms of beliefs, values and morals held in relation to sexuality and familial groupings, unlike some other types of intentional communities that identify as gay or lesbian, polyamorous, or any other sexuality or familial organisational descriptor. Therefore, residents held a variety of views, and took part in a variety of practices, in relation to sexuality and familial groupings. Over the duration of my fieldwork, there was an average of approximately fifteen residents that were involved in a consistent heterosexual relationship with either another resident or someone who lived off the property. Some of the couples had children, while others did not. There was also a queer-identifying family, which consisted of six or more residents, including children, and two other couples that identified as either queer or same-sex desiring. Additionally, there was anywhere from ten to fifteen males and a similar amount of females who could be considered single for some, or all, of the time that I was there. Some of the residents, be they part of a couple with or without children or someone without a partner, were explicitly monogamous, while others were engaged in, or at least exploring, polyamory.

From this brief overview, it is clear that sexuality, and indeed sex, was being actively negotiated by and among community residents. It was not uncommon to hear quite open and honest conversations about someone's experience of hetero or homoerotic behaviour or how a particular person might be feeling about being in a monogamous or polyamorous relationship. Ringer (2001) argues that such "sex-positive" talk is integral to constructing nonmonogamous identities. Although many

residents identified themselves as monogamous, this active negotiation and re-conceptualising of normative, heterosexual views on sexuality and familial relations was still largely supported as part of the project of critiquing the status quo in American society. Nevertheless, this also led to tension being caused for, and between, community residents, not so much due to a lack of respect for others' beliefs and values, but more due to fear, jealousy and uncertainty in regard to sexual and familial relations. The following discussion of polyamory as a concept that was circulating widely amongst Cedar River residents is instructive.

Polyamory

Polyamory, as a word being used to describe a particular outlook on both romantic and sexual relationships, came to my attention within the first few days of arriving at Cedar River. After some minor digging, I discovered that polyamory was a concept and lifestyle that many community residents were exploring, though it was seen as somewhat problematic by other residents. No matter who I talked to about it, they all used the term with a degree of familiarity that suggested polyamory was something one encountered in the ordinary, everyday social environment. This left me feeling somewhat embarrassed to admit that I had never heard the word polyamory before setting foot on Cedar River land. However, it did not take long to uncover the meaning of this relationship and lifestyle orientation descriptor.

Polyamory is used to refer to "the philosophy and practice of loving more than one person at a time with honesty and integrity… In most cases, but not all, this involves some sexual or at least intensely intimate sensual behaviour" (McCullough and Hall 2003: 1). Having discovered its meaning, I was intrigued to know why it was that polyamory was such a hot topic at Cedar River. Upon doing a bit of research on the side, it became clear that polyamory was often associated with neo-pagan spirituality and the queer movement, both of which were recognised parts of residents' lifestyles at Cedar River, but neither of which was seemingly an interest or practice shared by all residents. Then it dawned on me. Polyamory, as a lifestyle philosophy and practice, is a project of questioning societal norms related to the nature of intimacy and loving relationships. As such, polyamorous people are questioning the valuing of the heterosexual, monogamous lifestyle that is central to Western notions of romantic and sexual relationships, over that of an alternative

approach to love, sex and intimacy. It could, therefore, be plausibly argued that polyamory was endorsed by many Cedar River residents because it provided a more fulfilling alternative to either long-term or serial monogamy. This seems a reasonable explanation for why polyamory, as both idea and practice, was circulating so visibly around Cedar River, considering the community's overriding project was to re-imagine social norms, beliefs, values and ethics in opposition to a perceived American mainstream.

However, as I mentioned above, polyamory was seen as somewhat problematic by certain residents. For instance, a young woman who was part of the same community orientation programme as myself applied to become a community member directly after completing the week-long programme. As part of presenting herself to the community, she explained that she identified as polyamorous and was currently involved in a polyamorous relationship with the father of her youngest child. While this announcement did not provoke much discussion at the time, when her membership application was being considered, both her view on sexuality and her current familial set up came to play a significant role in her being denied membership.

The woman was told that some community members were reluctant to accept another polyamorous member, as polyamory had caused "drama" within the community on past occasions. I later questioned residents on what was meant by "drama" and I was told that some members felt that those residents who were involved in polyamorous relationships spent an inordinate amount of time "processing" relationship issues, which put a lot of stress on the community. In other words, it was not the idea or philosophy behind polyamory that bothered some community residents, but rather the perceived results of practising polyamory. The woman was also told that she would not be considered for membership until the community members had a chance to meet her current partner, as he would presumably be involved with the community to a large degree, if not choosing to become a member himself. The practice of meeting all members of a familial grouping who would potentially seek community membership before accepting one person from a recognised grouping was generally applied across the board at Cedar River, as it was felt that all 'family' members needed to be assessed and accepted as

individuals, not just by virtue of association. However, due to the fairly political nature of the first objection to her membership, it was felt by some residents that the second excuse was just a valid way of delaying the decision until some unknown point in the future.

How, then, can we account for the stress and sometimes negative attitude certain residents displayed in relation to polyamory and polyamorous people? In a sense, polyamory became the catch-all term for choosing to be in open relationships or partaking in multiple sexual partners at a time for those residents who were unfamiliar with the entirety of the lifestyle philosophy. I once had one of the newer residents, who was in her early twenties, ask me which community members were actively exploring polyamory. I responded to the best of my knowledge and then enquired as to whether she was seeking some advice or support around a polyamorous relationship. She responded that she thought she might be polyamorous because she was dating two men at once and did not want to choose between the two. I asked her whether this was not just a usual dating scenario through which people get to know each other and explore their options, as polyamory generally involves seeking out committed, loving relationships with multiple people based on trust. She agreed that I was probably right, as neither relationship was particularly deep or loving; they were just for the experience of enjoying other people.

This encounter got me thinking that perhaps curiosity, misconceptions and suspicion about polyamory existed among some residents at Cedar River because of the communal emphasis placed on intimacy in all inter-personal relationships. Polyamorous relationships and the concept of polyamory served as one vaguely comprehendible and somewhat visible example of how normative values, in regard to interpersonal, including romantic and sexual relationships, might be re-conceptualised. It therefore became the primary way of talking and thinking about non-normative romantic and sexual relationships, even though there was much confusion as to what polyamory *really* meant or looked like. Plenty of residents who were in non-normative romantic and/or sexual relationships did not consider themselves polyamorous. Yet, it was polyamory that seemingly got the attention because of the challenge it seemingly posed to normative views of sexuality.

Confusion, Curiosity, Jealousy and Fear

Indeed, I would argue that what was at issue for most residents was not whether or not someone identified as polyamorous, but rather how they conceived of and interpreted intimacy. Since intimacy was something that everybody endeavoured to share with everybody else, in vaguely specified ways, but intimacy is also closely linked with ideas about sex and sexuality among most Americans, there was room for much uncertainty and confusion as to the bounds of intimacy as a social ethic. Residents, through both their re-conceptualisation of intimacy as central to interpersonal relations and their refiguring of normative views on sexuality, were attempting to explore the distinction between sexual and other forms of intimacy (such as the intimacy derived from 'presumed friendship') daily. However, I suggest that it is because there was no communal consensus on a particular ideology pertaining to sexuality and sex that the regular expressions of intimacy between residents, although understood on one level as expressions of sociality, were, on another level, acts open to much interpretation and ambiguity. A brief discussion of intimacy as a bodily practice will help me to illustrate.

Intimacy as Bodily Practice

Intimacy at Cedar River was not only displayed through disclosing one's thoughts and emotions to others and attempting to be receptive to the thoughts and emotions of all community residents, it was also displayed through close and abundant physical contact. The personal growth programme run by Cedar River residents and affiliates put forth the belief that most members of 'mainstream' American society are lacking in physical touch. This idea, like many others from the programme, circulated widely among community residents, in general, and was therefore being addressed in an intentional manner through daily practice. This meant that Cedar River residents would often hug, hold hands, give each other massages, cuddle and generally engage in a lot of bodily contact with one another. These acts were explicitly understood as acts of intimacy, while also being conceptualised as ways of increasing individual and communal well-being (as will be discussed further in Chapter Seven).

Focusing this attention on close physical contact as a means for expressing sociality, however, is implying a decoupling of sex and sexuality from intimacy. In

his book on heterosexuality and love in modern Western society, Johnson (2005) goes to great lengths to show how the normative societal view of intimacy is intrinsically linked to the notion of an ideal relationship between love and sex. According to his analysis, intimacy, as understood through a normative, heterosexual framework, is ideally created through finding the right balance of love and sex in a given relationship, which is generally thought to follow a pattern of love first, sex afterwards. In this way, "making love", understood to be the process of engaging in sex as part of a loving relationship[7], becomes the most profound level of intimacy one can experience (Johnson 2005: 51–58). This conceptual link between sex and intimacy, according to Johnson, also results in the delegitimisation of forms of intimacy that fall outside sexual desire and practice (p.131-134). For instance, engaging in close bodily contact with someone who is not the object of one's sexual desire becomes a confusing and somewhat distressing situation for individuals who subscribe to the Western normative, heterosexual construction of love, sex and intimacy.

According to this logic then, if intimacy is decoupled from sex and sexuality conceptually, the bodily practice of intimacy as a means of simply expressing sociality with those around you, be they the object of your sexual desire or not, should no longer be a confusing or distressing experience. This appeared to be the rationale behind the Cedar River community's valuing of intimacy apart from sex and sexuality. In other words, intimacy, be it physical, emotional or mental, should be an everyday comfortable and rewarding experience that promotes communal well-being. Yet, the emphasis on intimacy as a bodily practice apart from sex could also be understood as a communal coping mechanism put in place in order to deal with the tensions that arose as a result of being forced to actively negotiate diverse forms of sexuality on a daily basis at Cedar River. Put more clearly, a communal focus on intimacy becomes a way of actively ignoring, or refusing to take a stance on, the inevitable complications and tensions that arise between residents who are sexually active according to a range of beliefs and experience.

[7] It should be noted that the phrase 'making love' has only recently taken on this meaning. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, in 1950 Mervyn Peake used the phrase in his Gormenghast trilogy to mean copulation. By 1967, this meaning of the phrase had fallen into common usage. Prior to 1950, 'making love' referred to paying amorous attention to [one].

Taking the above discussion into account, then, suggests that the physical, mental and emotional intimacy on which sociality was centred at Cedar River caused some amount of jealousy, uncertainty, and fear, especially for those who identified as monogamous in their relationship with their lover, or had just begun to explore polyamory, due to the lingering ambiguity surrounding exactly what kinds of relationships were denoted by what kinds of intimacy. The most visible situation in which previously unexperienced types and levels of intimacy between community residents caused jealousy and uncertainty took place between Eldin and his wife Betty. According to Eldin, the situation began shortly after arriving and continued, on and off, for the majority of the time that they, and I, lived at Cedar River. He described his initial recognition of the tension created by the intimacy which was so central to sociality at Cedar River thus:

> And then like [Betty] and I started to have to deal with being in an intense social environment and being a couple in that environment, because couples were kind of dropping left and right. They were forming and dissolving on almost a weekly – monthly – if not weekly basis. And I remember noticing that right away and noticing all the couples were leaving, too. The ones that weren't falling apart were leaving [Cedar River] and I was like "that's interesting". And then like a few – one or two or three weeks go by – and I'm like "oh shit, I can kind of see why" cause she starts to drift away from me interpersonally and I can kind of relate because I felt earlier…I mean being in a monogamous relationship for me has always been difficult, you know, because of me trying to reconcile what feel like more primal urges to be attracted to lots of women at any given time and having to navigate that terrain of, you know, am I committed to one or am I committed to no one and how does that look, etcetera, etcetera. It's just…that's always been a challenge for me. God, it's still a challenge for me. And it was a challenge for her. She's very social. She's very enigmatic, you know. And that was the beginning of a lot of difficulties. Difficulties that I really had deep problems in even beginning to get a footing in how to deal with them or understand them or anything.
>
> (Interview Aug. 24, 2007)

This excerpt comes from an interview that I conducted after having known Eldin and Betty for almost a year. I had been party to some of their disagreements and discussions concerning Eldin's fear and frustration and Betty's uncertainty and curiosity. Eldin felt Betty's displays of intimacy towards other men in the community were clear signs of sexual attraction, as opposed to new ways of expressing sociality, and Betty, while insisting that she did not intend to have sex

with other men, would not deny that her displays of intimacy were both social and sexual at the same time. In the end, she agreed to cease developing an intimate relationship with certain men that Eldin identified as problematic for him, but she strongly felt that this had impinged on her ability to be fully social with these men.

One has to ask whether Betty would have felt that her ability to be social with the 'off-limits' men was being hindered if intimacy, in the emotional, mental and physical forms I have described, were not understood as central to sociality at Cedar River. I do not think there is an easy answer to this question; however, I am arguing that the emphasis placed on intimacy as something which constitutes sociality, as opposed to sexuality or familiality, at Cedar River caused these tensions to articulate in specific ways. Furthermore, it appears as if the decoupling of bodily intimacy from sex and sexuality in standard Cedar River rhetoric, while productively creating more intimacy among residents, ignores the cultural and social influence of residents' previous experience in regard to sex, sexuality and intimacy.

Thus, strain is placed on the entire web of social relations at Cedar River. If we think back to Prince and Riches (2000) concept of 'instant friendship', it is notable that nowhere do they suggest that the intimacy associated with instant friendship led to confusion and fear in relation to sexual or familial relations. There are two obvious reasons why these two examples appear to have different consequences. The first is that, while in both cases it was argued that a certain quality of interpersonal relationality, rather than structure, was central to sociality, in Prince and Riches' example, it was an ethic of mutuality, rather than intimacy, which provided the justification for the New Agers' behaviour (p.135). Thus, as Prince and Riches explain, the instant friendship relationship was still a private relationship, which allows for more autonomy in terms of interpersonal relationships; whereas I argue that presumed friendship was public and therefore socially encouraged through commitments and practices. Consequently, at Cedar River, residents were continuously urged into intimate encounters which might then become the object of confusion, fear and jealousy.

Second, and more a product of practicality then any other reason, was that Cedar River was smaller and more compact than the Alternative Community in Glastonbury. The New Agers in Glastonbury are spread throughout and around the

town, numbering between 500 and 700 (in 1990 when the ethnography was conducted) in a town much larger still (Prince and Riches 2000:64). The residents of Cedar River, on the other hand, averaged at about 50 to 60 in number during my stay, and lived nearly on each other's doorsteps. Thus, the residents were involved in a multitude of different types of relationships with everyone else leading to overlap and entanglement in regards to relationship boundaries, the consequence of which was some level of confusion, fear and jealousy.

Conclusion

The residents of Cedar River, because of their choice to establish a form of sociality based on intimacy in all interpersonal relations, felt they needed to intentionally actualise their re-conceptualisation of society with all community residents in order to perpetuate the communal values, beliefs and morals. Thus they participated in regular activities, such as millings, in order to publicly enact intimacy. Of course, as Roger noted, to establish intimate relationships with everybody was impractical; however, to abandon the desire to do so was to threaten the very form of Cedar River.

This chapter has attempted to illustrate these points by looking at some of the ways in which residents' everyday experiences at Cedar River were articulated through the conceptualisation of intimacy as central to sociality. The social displays of bodily and emotional intimacy between residents became the terrain of much ambiguity as residents attempted to challenge normative beliefs regarding friendship, familial relations, sex and sexuality, requiring residents to actively reflect on their beliefs relating to sociality. It is not surprising that these aspects of Cedar River life were fraught with tension, considering the dominant conceptualisation of intimacy in Western, and more specifically American, society at present. Intimacy, conceptualised as "emotional communication" (Giddens 1999: 4) and reserved for only private encounters between friends, parents and their children, and lovers (Giddens 1992, 1999; Prager 1997; Jamieson 1998), has a limited role in everyday societal activity. Therefore, the struggle to keep intimacy as central to sociality at Cedar River was essentially just another aspect of the daily struggle to actualise the communal re-conceptualisation of 'the good society'.

Chapter Three

Organisational Matters: Consensus Decision-Making and the Threat of Bureaucracy

The regular occurrence of meetings seemed an unavoidable fact of life at Cedar River. I was tipped off to this before even setting foot on Cedar River property. The very first phone conversation that occurred between myself and the community 'elder', who was also the resident in charge of fielding visitor enquiries at the time, included a warning that a lot of time was spent sitting in meetings at Cedar River. I did not think to question why she was choosing to tell me *this* about daily life, as opposed to any other detail; but I later discovered that the casually-stated observation passed on to me via telephone from the longest-residing community member was central to the experience of membership at Cedar River.

By detailing the intricacies of different types of meetings and explaining their relationship to one another, this chapter initially aims to build a picture of the organisational structure at Cedar River. Meetings, while providing a forum for negotiating organisational objectives, also provided the primary context for residents to realise and reconstruct their beliefs, values and morals regarding social organisation. In other words, meetings at Cedar River provided the prime context for experiencing 'intention enactment'. They took on a certain pre-defined form, whereby specific roles were inhabited by each participant in order to ensure the 'correct' flow of action in regard to consensus decision-making. I argue that, through enacting the variety of formal roles, articulated in relation to the particular meeting context, the structure and processes of decision-making used at Cedar River allowed residents to experience themselves as members of an egalitarian organisation; or, for some, who were struggling to reconcile the disjuncture between the ideals and practices associated with consensus decision-making at Cedar River, as members of a "natural hierarchy"[8], characterised by ad hoc leadership. This, in turn, worked to create a specific sense of identity for both residents and the

[8]This was a phrase used by some Cedar River residents to describe the way in which they understood the social organisation of Cedar River to be. A more in-depth explanation of the meaning of this somewhat paradoxical phrase is given in the body of this chapter.

community-as-a-whole, thereby contributing to residents' experiences of leading meaningful lives.

Due to both the strain of overly long and abundant meetings on community members' morale and the economic needs of the non-profit educational centre, a new decision-making structure was adopted six months into my fieldwork which caused residents to question the link between organisational structure and identity. By exploring this transition, the second half of the chapter illustrates how the specific mode of social organisation in operation at Cedar River came to be of central concern for residents. I argue that, due to the conceptual and experiential link between social organisation and identity, the introduction of a more bureaucratic structure threatened residents' abilities to continue to pursue a meaningful life, as they had conceived of it, at Cedar River. This chapter builds on Chapter Two, which analysed the quality of sociality, by revealing some of the ways in which the organisational structure of Cedar River, while not seen by residents as dictating interpersonal relationships, nevertheless required intimacy to remain at the centre of sociality in order that the values implied by egalitarianism and "natural hierarchy" continued to be supported by the residents themselves.

A Variety of Meetings

The Cedar River community had a seemingly endless need for decision-making gatherings. These gatherings, which usually took the form of structured meetings, were used to make decisions on everything, be it community or non-profit related, from who would live in which dwelling to how the yearly budget would be distributed. Consensus was the community's decision-making process of choice and had been since the official formation of Cedar River as a non-profit organisation and intentional community nearly twenty years ago. At the time of my arrival in September of 2006, Cedar River had set up a structure wherein consensus decision-making was regularly occurring in five different types of meetings. In no specific order, the five regularly occurring general meeting types were Core Group, Intention Circle, committee meetings, Board meetings and Visioning.

Each type of meeting consisted of a different combination of people; however, full participation in any of the five types was open to anyone who was recognised as a member, or in the process of becoming a member, of the Cedar River

community. I have left out membership meetings here because those meetings, although done by consensus, were aimed at the very specific purpose of deciding on membership and therefore lay outside the organisational structure as discussed here. Additionally, in February of 2007, a new decision-making structure was put into place and a sixth type of regularly occurring decision-making meeting came into existence, known as guild meetings. The significance of this restructure will be explained further on in the chapter; however it is useful to note here that Core Group became the Council of Guilds in the new structure. In the following paragraphs, I describe each type of regularly occurring meeting in greater detail.

Core Group

Core Group was a weekly meeting, attended regularly by the same four or five community members, which functioned as an initial filter for all community and non-profit issues, concerns, and happenings. It was formed with a view to reducing the amount of time each community member spent hearing the details of each individual concern or issue. Accordingly, the 'job' of Core Group members was to discuss all proposals made by community residents and, assuming consensus was reached and the proposals appeared straight-forward enough to be dealt with by Core Group alone, make a recommendation on behalf of the group regarding each proposal to the entire community during Intention Circle (the weekly community-wide decision-making meeting) in order to expedite the decision-making process. Core Group membership was chosen on a volunteer basis and members rotated about every six months in order to keep decision-making responsibilities shared equally among the community members. One exception to this rotation was the community 'elder', who appeared to be a permanent member of Core Group, presumably because she interpreted part of her role as 'elder' as keeping an eye on all community happenings.

During the period of time Core Group existed over the course of my fieldwork, three women and two men were the recognised members. Additionally, every community member was welcomed to attend as often, and for as long, as they pleased; however, people who were not recognised Core Group members rarely attended, except if they had a proposal or report to present. This, in my view was curious, as attending Core Group provided a prime opportunity to keep on top of most activities that were going on in the community and, it is significant to note, I

often had a much clearer idea of what was happening, and when, at Cedar River than many others who did not attend Core Group.

Core Group meetings took place in the morning and generally lasted three hours, finishing when the agenda for the day had been fully dealt with or exhaustion set in. The running of the Core Group meeting followed a particular format which was similar to all decision-making meetings at Cedar River. Each meeting began by 'opening the circle'. This was done by forming a circle and holding hands, ensuring that the left hand was facing up and the right hand was facing down in order to allow for a clear flow of energy between participants[9]. The meeting facilitator, who was chosen the week prior to the meeting on a volunteer basis, would then call all the entities of the land, and any other chosen beings, to be present for the duration of the meeting, ending by calling him/herself present at the meeting[10]. Moving around the circle to the left, each individual in turn would call him/herself present and invite any additional beings of their choice to be present for the meeting. The 'calling in' ended when each individual had called him/herself in and hands were let go. Next, a minute or two was given to appreciations. This was a time for those in attendance to state what or who they appreciate and why. Not everyone was required to say something, but generally each individual had at least one appreciation. Then, there was a recap of the previous weeks Intention Circle decisions, followed by department reports, such as maintenance, events, or personal growth, and finally the agenda was set for the meeting.

The agenda was comprised of proposals submitted by those involved with the community (one did not have to be a resident of Cedar River to submit a proposal to Core Group) and any issues that Core Group members were aware of, such as upcoming housing changes or membership reviews. Additionally, time was made available every week for a finance report and a human resources/intern report, each given by the resident who dealt most closely with those areas. When each topic had

[9] A belief circulates among Wiccan practitioners that this alignment of hands assures the correct flow of energy (Penczaks 2004). Supposedly this is based on metaphysics. While I do not know exactly how this belief was introduced at Cedar River, I suspect it was through affiliation with Wiccan or New Age Religion groups.

[10] The founding members of Cedar River, in conjunction with various community members over the years, developed certain rituals for meetings based on the spiritual beliefs of Machaelle Small Wright, of which this is one. These rituals were passed on through daily practice, though I suspect that many residents of Cedar River had never questioned why certain rituals were enacted. I discovered the origin of this practice by asking one of the co-founders.

been dealt with to the best of the group's ability, the meeting was ended with a 'calling out'. Once again, hands were joined, the facilitator said some words of thanks and released him/herself from the circle along with any beings that had been invited in, and each person, in turn, released him/herself from the circle along with any beings that person had invited in.

Intention Circle

Intention Circle was the weekly decision-making meeting to which the whole community, member or otherwise, was encouraged to attend. It was held for approximately one and a half hours in the afternoon, just before dinner was served. During this meeting, recommendations from Core Group were decided on in a consensus manner and major topics that Core Group felt were whole community topics got discussed and either decided on or sent to committees for further consideration. The decisions made in Intention Circle generally resulted in non-profit policies or community agreements; however, sometimes decisions were made in order to clarify a policy or agreement, which generally took the form of deciding on the permissibility of some action or another. Intention Circle could be different every week, depending on who facilitated, what topics were on the agenda, how many people decided to attend and numerous other factors that affected the pace and efficiency of the meeting. Generally speaking, however, Intention Circle meetings tended to be more focused than Core Group meetings, presumably because more people had their time at stake during Intention Circle.

The Intention Circle format was much the same as Core Group. It began with the week's facilitator, who was chosen on a volunteer basis the week prior, leading the 'calling in' of the circle, followed by announcements, a recap of the previous week's Intention Circle agreements, a 'check-in' on any recent events held on Cedar River property, and a reading of the Core Group recommendations. The facilitator would then ask if there were any concerns or questions about the Core Group recommendations and, assuming minimal discussion ensued, a 'show of thumbs' was requested. Thumbs were the way in which Cedar River residents showed their approval or disapproval of the particular issue at hand. A thumb pointed up was 'yes', a thumb to the side was a 'stand-aside', which signals a resident's decision to abstain from participating due to any variety of reasons, and a thumb pointed down

was a ‘block’, which signalled that a resident was blocking the decision. If consensus was reached on the Core Group recommendations, the facilitator would then announce the meeting’s agenda and ask if there were any additional items to be added. Then, much the same as in Core Group, each item was discussed until consensus was reached or it was decided that the topic needed more consideration by a committee of interested parties. The meeting ended with a ‘calling out’ at dinner time, or thereabouts, whether or not the agenda was finished. Unfinished agenda items were automatically placed onto the following week’s agenda and notes of the week’s meeting were sent out via e-mail to inform all residents of the meeting’s outcomes.

Committee Meetings

Committee meetings were used at Cedar River to address specific issues or topic areas that needed focussed attention from a group of interested individuals. Committees were usually formed when the community could not reach consensus at Intention Circle, due to lack of information, and the resulting committee was charged with returning by a specified time with a clearer proposal. Committees were also formed by individuals dedicated to a certain area of community life, like finance or child-rearing, that were specialised enough for most individuals to feel uninterested in being part of the decision-making process. Committee meetings were run in a much more informal manner than Core Group or Intention Circle meetings and the decisions resulting from them were ultimately subject to the community-wide consensus at Intention Circle.

Board Meetings

Board meetings, and the existence of a Board, were required by the bylaws of the non-profit organisation under which Cedar River was incorporated. They occurred quarterly and were generally attended by the current Board members, community members, and any other people who had been invited by a community member. During the time of my fieldwork, the Board was made up of three community members and three non-member/non-resident individuals. All Board members were formally nominated and accepted by the existing Board members through a consensus process, and Board members that came from the community were agreed upon by consensus by community members prior to the official nomination by the

Board. In preparation for these meetings, each department of Cedar River submitted a report for the Board, which consisted of current undertakings in that area, financial details and future plans. Board meetings began like all other formal (and most informal) meetings with a "calling in", followed by a recall of the last Board meeting minutes, moving on to the agenda and ending with a "calling out".

The Board's duties were to oversee the actions of the non-profit and to ensure all dealings were legal and made with Cedar River's best interest in mind. The main powers exercised by the Board were to change bylaws, approve the annual budget and all bank-related decisions, and approve the long-term direction of the non-profit. In practice, while the Board did perform these duties, all decisions were actually made by the community members in Intention Circle first before coming before the Board. This may explain why it seemed that community members did not take as much interest in Board meetings as the Board members would have liked. Granted, there were times that a portion of a Board meeting was labelled 'closed' and only Board members were permitted to attend, but this did not explain the poor member turnout at the Board meeting I attended. In any case, it was only in the last months of my fieldwork that there was any mention of the Board actually acting executively and making the decisions for the community. When I left, this was still a contentious topic.

Visioning

Visioning was a community-wide decision-making meeting that occurred over the course of approximately four days, once (but sometimes twice) a year. It was a meeting that was only open to community members (and friendly anthropologists that can make themselves useful) due to it being both a long-term forward planning meeting and a context for interpersonal reconnection. The first day of the meeting was given over to interpersonal reconnection activities, such as those described in Chapters One and Two, and the remaining days were used to address any number of long-term plans, such as changing the organisational structure of the non-profit, how to best organise the community gardens or what to do about aging community housing.

Visioning meetings were less formally run than Intention Circle meetings generally were, and smaller group work was used in addition to whole group

processes. That being said, the ritual 'calling in' and 'calling out' took place at the beginning and end of each day of meetings and the group as a whole appeared extremely focussed throughout the several days of day-long meetings. Final decisions were, again, being made by consensus at Visioning; however, they were generally in the form of 'next steps' for the community to make in order to actualise their plans for the future, rather than policies or procedures.

Why Meetings?

I have used the last section to detail the types of meetings at which decision-making was occurring at Cedar River in order to foreground meetings as the central activity in which both communal and personal values relating to social organisation and governance were being enacted by residents at Cedar River. Helen Schwartzman (1989) champions the use of meetings as objects of anthropological analysis because of the often taken for granted socio-cultural processes embedded in meetings. She points out that meetings act as both sense making opportunities for communities and individuals, as well as opportunities for "producing, reproducing and sometimes transforming the social and cultural system" (1989: 38). Meetings at Cedar River served as the site for experiencing 'community' in action because of the cognitive link between consensus and community (which I explained in greater detail in Chapter 1); however, they were also *the* designated place for making decisions that would result in policies or agreements that had a lasting effect on shaping Cedar River. In other words, meetings, Intention Circle in particular, provided the single most important forum for realising organisational, and indeed some personal, objectives; and, thus, what occurred at meetings provides us with deeper insight into what we might call 'intention enactment'.

Intention – meaning purposefulness with regard to certain plans - enactment, at least as it was articulated in the context of meetings at Cedar River, was embodied through the experience of 'process'. Process, in this case, refers both to the agreed rules of action for each decision-making meeting and the idea that what occurs throughout the course of a meeting is more important than the specifics of a given outcome. To clarify the meaning of process in the second instance, it signifies the valuing of the actual handling or treatment of an issue in the context of a meeting, over that of the ultimate conclusion reached in reference to said issue.

Partaking in the process of decision-making at Cedar River allowed residents to display the skills - such as good facilitation, listening or support for different viewpoints - that were valued by the community-as-a-whole. As will be explained further on in this chapter, these skills were understood by residents to form the basis of the type of community or society (something akin to egalitarianism) that Cedar River was ideally intending, and thus spending a lot of time in meetings, day in and day out, was seemingly justifiable as long as the emphasis remained on process. This is not to say that residents, in general, enjoyed being in long and abundant meetings. In fact, this wound up having a negative affect on the morale of quite a few residents; however, until the restructure of decision-making processes occurred (and even to some degree afterwards), residents used meetings to demonstrate their perceived strengths in the handling of, what one resident described as, the "imprecision of relevance" that pervaded individual's attempts at "being clear and getting down to it and saying what needs to be said so that [they] can move forward" (Ted, Interview Aug. 11, 2007).

Although a focus on process is often characteristic of groups that make use of consensus decision-making (Coy 2003; Graeber 2004), its particular articulation at Cedar River is culturally specific. This is due to the specificity of the community-prescribed flow of action in meetings, the particular ways in which consensus meeting roles were defined, inhabited and used, and the actual topics that were deemed appropriate - and thus were allocated time - for discussion in meetings. As such, I use the following sections to take a more detailed look at the aspects of 'process' involved with meetings at Cedar River in order that I might demonstrate more accurately what it is that meetings do for Cedar River residents and, subsequently, why they occurred with such frequency.

Additionally, as I suggested above, meetings eventually provided the catalyst for a transformation in community focus which subsequently resulted in a significant change in the membership of the community (i.e. many older residents chose to leave and new ones arrived). Gaining an understanding of how meetings were able to provide the space for such monumental change forces us to question the relationship between individual meetings and the overall organisational structure. On the one hand, individual meetings at Cedar River were acts of critique against the

bureaucratisation of organisational structures too often encountered in Western society, and therefore a lot of emphasis was placed on process and the actualisation of consensus decision-making. On the other hand, meetings were events that were ostensibly about furthering organisational goals via a designated process that was rather obsessed with structure, though not particularly bureaucratic, as the decision-makers were themselves the leadership in an ad hoc manner. If we view meetings from this perspective, they provide fertile ground for exploring the impact of introducing alternative ways of structuring relationships between residents and residents and the community-as-a-whole (Schwartzman 1989).

What is Consensus Decision-Making?

Some discussion of what is meant by consensus decision-making is required in order to ground the meeting practices of Cedar River residents theoretically. Traditionally, anthropologists have tended to discuss consensus decision-making in relation to structures of governance or social control in small, stateless societies (Bailey 1965; Colson 1975). Consensus was understood as a form of governance that required close face-to-face contact between all individuals of a given society and frequent meetings wherein said individuals could slowly pool information regarding various issues of importance (ibid: 54). More recently, the anthropologist David Graeber has taken up the topic of consensus decision-making in relation to anarchist groups in North America. Graeber, not unlike earlier anthropologists (see Bailey 1965 for instance), views consensus in opposition to majority voting systems and suggests that consensus was/is the preferred method of decision-making among most egalitarian communities due to the fact that consensus, when carried out properly, ensures that all views are taken into account when reaching a decision. He describes the basic premise upon which consensus decision-making rests as follows:

> In consensus process, everyone agrees from the start on certain broad principles of unity and purposes for being for the group; but beyond that they also accept as a matter of course that no one is ever going to convert another person completely to their point of view, and probably shouldn't try; and that therefore discussion should focus on concrete questions of action, and coming up with a plan that everyone can live with and no one feels is in fundamental violation of their principles.
>
> (Graeber 2004:8)

Consensus decision-making has also been explored by a broad range of other social scientists, particularly those interested in social movements. Anna Snyder sums up consensus as "a non-hierarchical process based on equal participation of all participants in collective decisions" (2003:37). She further explains that "[i]n order to promote minimum differentiation between participants in relation to status and power, participants often rotate roles – particularly leadership roles – and share tasks and/or specialised knowledge" (2003:37). However, Jane Mansbridge (2003) argues that consensus decision-making does not necessarily produce equality as, traditionally, the consensus process has proven to perpetuate both informal inequality of influence and inequality of formal power (p.243). Nevertheless, an ideal of equality is often incorporated into more modern consensus processes, making it the decision-making process of choice for groups and organisations that strive to overcome various forms of existing power structures. Finally, the political scientist, Patrick Coy, notes that consensus decision-making is distinct from other decision-making processes due to the priority that is placed on the following four dynamics throughout the process:

- The active participation of each member in the discussion
- Using all the available resources of the group
- Listening
- Openness to alternative viewpoints

(Coy 2003:88)

He also points out that unanimity is not the goal of consensus, but rather consensus decision-making strives to produce absolute support for the decision reached from each member involved in the process.

How, then, we might ask, do the ideas and practices that were associated with consensus decision-making at Cedar River compare to anthropological and more general social scientific understandings of consensus? In the following sections I suggest that Cedar River residents were indeed attempting to make use of consensus decision-making in order to experience and promote a sort of egalitarian ideal of society. This ideal was made explicit through the use of terms such as 'equality', 'trust' and 'inclusion' in relation to consensus decision-making at Cedar River. Additionally, I argue that Cedar River residents viewed consensus decision-making as the most appropriate form of governance for themselves due to the association

made between small face-to-face communities and consensus. In other words, the use of consensus decision-making at Cedar River was understood as 'natural'.

However, as will be revealed through ethnographic illustration, consensus decision-making in practice at Cedar River did not quite live up to the ideal of egalitarianism that was associated with it, and thus some residents came to understand the inequalities perpetuated through the consensus decision-making process as part of the 'natural' state of affairs amongst humans in society. Furthermore, the consensus process was, in practice, much more arduous and time consuming than ideally envisioned and therefore Cedar River's chosen consensus process became the focus of much organisational attention. This eventually resulted in the restructure of some elements of the decision-making process which forced residents to consider the meaning of the disjuncture between reality and ideals. Subsequently, a number of residents chose to leave Cedar River. I suggest that this was due to the fact that the new decision-making process, although potentially better suited to the needs of Cedar River organisationally, no longer masked the unbridgeable divide between the ideals associated with consensus decision-making and the realities of the process.

Consensus Takes Shape

Cedar River residents used a consensus model similar to what Mansbridge (2003: 248) calls 'Quaker Consensus'. This form of consensus is considered, at present, to be the most common interpretation (ibid: 240). In general terms, all participants are required to assume an active role in consensus meetings, chosen from a number of designated roles. As I mentioned in Chapter One, the designated roles at Cedar River were that of: facilitator, note-taker, time-keeper, 'vibes' watcher and participant. Each role carries certain responsibilities and expectations (the specifics of which for Cedar River is detailed below) that, when carried out properly, should allow the group to reach consensual decisions in an organised manner. However, 'Quaker Consensus' is distinct in that *absolute* consensus is not required in order for a decision to be reached. Instead the decisions that are reached by the group are understood as ones that all participants can *accept*, which includes the option of registering disagreement by the formal act of 'standing aside' so as not to block a decision.

The only 'formal' training in consensus decision-making that was routinely offered to Cedar River members was a module of the Community Orientation Programme (COP), a community-run programme that acted as a gateway to community membership which I have described more fully in Chapter One. Having sat through that module three times, I can attest to the fact that it was merely an introduction to consensus decision-making and a brief chance to try out one of the above stated roles. (As I write this, I am aware that a formal day-long training session has been scheduled for Cedar River community members, run by a well-known local consensus educator. I can only assume that it has come to the attention of the group that consensus decision-making is in fact a process that requires training and skill, the result of which is a decision-making process that works to reflect the values of the organisation.)

Many people who became members of Cedar River, however, did have some previous experience in consensus decision-making due to being involved with groups such as anarchist, environmentalist, social justice or religious (Quaker) organisations that tend to use consensus as their decision-making process of choice. Nevertheless, some Cedar River community members had not been introduced to consensus decision-making before arriving to the community and, besides the brief introduction they received at COP (which some individuals managed to miss, anyway, because of any number of 'extraordinary' circumstances), learned to take part in the process by actually being part of the process.

At the start of each decision-making meeting, the consensus roles were filled diligently, almost without fail, excepting the facilitator who was chosen sometime prior to the meeting in order to allow for preparation. As would be expected, certain residents were better at certain roles than others, which meant that, at times, I got the impression that each role was being filled by someone from the small group of residents that usually filled that role. Thus, alluding back to Mansbridge's (2003: 243) critique of consensus, it could be argued that certain inequalities were perpetuated through the consensus decision-making process at Cedar River. In other words, those residents that had either been residing at Cedar River longer, and therefore had more experience with consensus, or otherwise acquired the skills to be a more active participant in the process, had their points-of-view heard more loudly

and clearly than others. Having said that, each role was open to any community member, and often non-members that had been active with the group, such as interns or anthropologists, were also encouraged to take on a role.

Consensus Decision-Making Roles

The "facilitator" of each meeting was responsible for making sure the agenda was being tended to. S/he was required to remain neutral on the topic at hand while ensuring that each participant was getting a chance to be heard and assisting the group to find coherence by repeating common themes. The "note-taker" was charged with taking clear and accurate notes during the meeting, especially when agreements were made and policies set. He/she was also often responsible for sending the notes out to the community via e-mail and posting a hard copy in the appropriate group folder. The "time-keeper" was in charge of keeping the allocated time for each agenda item and usually played an active role in keeping the meeting on track by announcing the time remaining on a topic when the group seemed to be getting carried away. The "vibes watcher" was responsible for overseeing the group process and ensuring that all members were included, each person was being treated with respect, there did not seem to be any underlying or hidden agendas and the process was remaining relaxed. For instance, the vibes watcher would say something like "I'd like to remind everyone to breathe" when the general mood was getting tense or he/she would simply say "vibes" in response to something a person said or did that felt inappropriate. All others present at the meeting that held decision-making powers (non-members held no decision-making powers at Intention Circle even though they were welcome to attend) held the role of participant, which meant that they were expected to respect the consensus process by airing their views on the topic at hand, if they were pertinent, and then remaining open to hearing and considering the views of others.

The roles described above set out, in fairly specific terms, the acceptable attitudes and modes of behaviour that residents who choose to take part in the consensus decision-making process at Cedar River were supposed to *display*. In other words, the roles function as a structuring devise for consensus meetings, ensuring that people know their place in the decision-making process and, ideally, that no one

person is able to assume a more powerful position than another. However, I am suggesting that there was also an expectation, inherent in the notion of being a 'consensus' community, which encouraged residents to conflate the *role* inhabited by a resident during consensus meetings, with some essential *self* that said resident was understood to be. To clarify, because the very act of participating in a consensus process was understood by many of its residents to be a defining quality of Cedar River as an intentional community, and the process of consensus was very much equal to 'intention enactment', it became possible for those residents to be seen by fellow community residents, and to see themselves, in relation to a certain identity consensus decision-making conjures.

Consensus Decision-Making Constitutes an Identity

Why was consensus Cedar River's decision-making process of choice? To put it another way, what beliefs, values and morals are associated with consensus that might motivate the residents of Cedar River to use it to structure the relationships between residents, and residents and the community-as-whole in matters of organisational concern? Some fairly good answers can be found in the document that accompanied the COP module on consensus decision-making. Most explicitly, the handout lists a set of values that underlie the consensus process, which includes: "equality, trust, respect, inclusion, highest good and empowerment for all"; "unity, not unanimity"; and using "conflict as a way of weaving together all viewpoints into a cohesive whole". These words are telling, in that they presume that all persons who are taking part in the consensus process at Cedar River will hold these values ahead of others and act accordingly, at least during decision-making meetings.

Such values are often associated with egalitarianism by anthropologists (See Woodburn 1982; Riches 2003; Graeber 2004 for example) and thus I suggest that the ideal mode of social organisation towards which Cedar River residents are striving through using consensus decision-making is akin to egalitarianism. In fact, when I asked residents in interviews to describe the social structure of Cedar River, many responded that egalitarianism seemed the best descriptor, based on the above stated values.

The COP handout also states that consensus is a "natural method of decision-making" for small groups. This idea is supported very closely by anthropological

analyses of consensus decision-making, wherein it was thought small groups, in which individuals participated in multiplex relations, tended towards the use of consensus in decision-making in order to prevent conflict (Bailey 1965; Graeber 2004). Bailey (1965) found this belief among Indian village councils, which he suggests derives from Rousseau's thoughts on human nature and man in society. Bailey found that the Indians among whom he conducted his research justified their use of consensus decision-making by proclaiming that it is a natural process for all human communities, and parliaments and party politics are only disruptive influences (1965:2–4).

Interestingly, Bailey (1965) also pointed out in his work with Indian village councils that values such as unity and equality, which are often thought to underlie the use of consensus decision-making, are not intrinsically linked to individuals, even though individuals might display what he calls "symbolic actions", such as muffling conflict, during decision-making processes. Rather, such values more likely denote that the *group* in question chooses to use a consensus process because they are structurally challenged in dealing with any form of minority dissent to decisions (pgs 5–9). More simply put, because the group in question (in this case Cedar River) is, as a group, responsible for enforcing their own decisions (i.e. there is no executive body that enforce decisions through sanctions) and residents of Cedar River live and work intimately with each other, they are more likely to use consensus decision-making to reinforce unity rather than risk a lack of cooperation from the dissenting minority that results from majority voting. This assertion, in fact, concurs with my argument in Chapter Two, which suggests that structure is only a secondary consideration at Cedar River, as sociality centres on the quality of interpersonal relationships.

After the explanation of consensus as "natural", the document handed out at the COP session goes on to claim that consensus was the decision-making process of choice for many Native American and other tribal peoples. It also mentions that The Quakers provide the most effective model for consensus decision-making, having used this process to conduct their business continuously since about 1650 due to their belief that there is "that of God in everyone". The first section of the handout concludes with a brief look at "contemporary" uses of consensus decision-making, in

which it states that consensus was the decision-making process of choice among members of the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley in the early 1960s and was used widely in the Women's, Peace, and Anti-nuclear Movements of the 1960s and 70s. David Graeber also links present forms of consensus decision-making to the Feminist and Anti-nuclear Movements of the 1960s and 70s, and goes so far as to state that the forms of consensus resulting from this recent history "constitutes the most important contribution to revolutionary practice in decades" (2007: 15–16). In stating this, Graeber is referring to the creative re-imagining of democratic political process that is expressed through consensus in alternative subcultural contexts, used precisely due to its emphasis on process itself.

Whether or not any of the above-stated claims are true is beside the point. What is interesting about these claims is that they clearly set out the historical and political trajectory which Cedar River, as a group, is imagining their use of consensus decision-making to be a part of. Schwartzman (1989) notes that meetings in "alternative organisations", such as Cedar River, frequently serve as the optimal place to enact such values and ideals (p.8–9). With this, I agree, as I have argued that meetings at Cedar River were a prime site for experiencing 'intention enactment'. However, I have gone a step further to argue that meetings not only provide a place for the negotiation and enactment of such beliefs and values, but they also serve as a context through which identity is constructed by, and ascribed to, residents and the community-as-a-whole. In other words, participation in meetings allowed residents and the community-as-a-whole to realise themselves as egalitarian.

Furthermore, the embodiment of egalitarianism in the context of meetings was a means through which residents came to experience their lives at Cedar River as meaningful, as they were actively working towards and creating the conditions of social equality and inclusivity through both the decision-making processes and the overall organisational structure. Riches (2003: 135-136) argues that the "modes of social organisation" suggested by values such as those I have just discussed, present themselves as meaningful to those who use them precisely due to the opposition these modes pose to Western mainstream modes of social organisation, which generally promote egalitarianism of opportunity (See Riches 2003 for an explanation

of egalitarianism of opportunity), which leads to inequity, and hierarchies based on individualistic interests.

The following ethnographic excerpt illustrates these points:

Intention Circle: June 6, 2007

I have chosen this particular meeting as an example because the meeting agenda consisted of some fairly weighty topics and, consequently, the meeting was both well-attended and commanded a distinct amount of focus and attention from all those involved. The meeting was facilitated by Cedric, a community member who had lived at Cedar River for at least eighteen months at the time that this meeting took place and was, therefore, reasonably well experienced in decision-making via the consensus process. After a reflection on the recent personal growth course that had taken place at Cedar River was given by the course facilitators and a review of the recent Board meeting was presented by Arthur, the Board president, the decision-making part of the meeting began.

The first agenda item was a consideration of whether or not a former community member, whose children still resided at Cedar River, could work a certain number of hours a month for the personal growth programme in exchange for the cost of her children's living expenses and any resources she and her current partner might use while being on Cedar River property. After much discussion, assent was consensually given with two stand asides (coming from Arthur and Mary), both apparently in response to the uncertain financial situation Cedar River was facing at that moment in time. The next agenda item was concerned with whether or not the community members wanted to partake in a personal growth programme designed specifically for themselves. Again, after some discussion, consensual assent was reached. The third agenda item was a proposal to introduce community service hour tracking sheets for a two month period. The proposer suggested that both the activities members considered as community service and the time spent doing these activities should be accurately recorded so that the community-as-a-whole could know whether their expectation of ten hours a week was realistic and accomplishing the types of goals that they envisioned being part of community service. Once again, the community members reached consensus and

the proposal was agreed to; yet not without a bit of discussion regarding appropriate consensus practice.

The way in which the facilitator, Cedric, called for the final decision, was objected to by one of the other community members, Darius, which resulted in the decision being made subject to "do over". Darius objected because Cedric did not ask the group whether there were any blocks or stand asides before asking for thumbs, which he felt made it hard for those who might have chosen to block or stand aside to do so. Darius said that he felt strongly about this point of process, as it had the potential to greatly affect both the decision immediately at hand and, perhaps more importantly, the nature of Cedar River as an intentional community.

Finally, the last agenda item to be discussed in the meeting was whether or not to replace Core Group with the Council of Guilds. Arthur presented this agenda item and explained how the new Council of Guilds would work. When it came time for thumbs, instead of stating the proposal in its entirety, Cedric simply said something to the effect of "all those in favour of inserting an 'O' between the 'C' and the 'G'…", at which point another objection was made. This time it was Roger. He said that he would not show thumbs on any proposal that had not been stated in its entirety, as it had the potential to undermine the consensus process by creating ambiguity and could thus result in communal disharmony. In a somewhat defeated manner, Cedric restated the proposal in its entirety and consensus for an acceptance was reached.

The above description is illustrative of how participation in the consensus process was seen by (most) residents to establish certain identity markers for themselves, and the community-as-a-whole, in relation to the meanings attached to consensus decision-making processes. Arthur and Mary, for instance, chose to exercise their ability to stand aside, thereby having it recorded in the meeting notes that they were concerned about the financial well-being of Cedar River. Thus, they used their participation in the process to establish that, although concerned about communal financial matters, they were not willing to thwart the will of the rest of the members, and thereby demonstrated a continued belief in the cooperative and participatory nature of consensus decision-making. Likewise, Darius and Roger, by insisting that

the correct process be followed, were establishing themselves as people who took part in a decision-making process that strove to create the conditions for a truly inclusive consensus to be reached, and were simultaneously establishing that Cedar River was an intentional community that only made decisions through the use of a process that was demonstrably and unambiguously committed to egalitarian ideals.

However, it could be argued that the consensus process I have illustrated, while establishing identity markers in relation to egalitarian ideals, was simultaneously working to mask the reality of the unequal and informal power relations that existed at Cedar River. For instance, the fact that both Arthur and Mary (two extremely knowledgeable residents who, although having been there for only a couple years, had taken on a large amount of responsibility for the running of the non-profit organisation) chose to stand aside and thus register a formal concern for the financial well-being of the community, could also be understood as an exercise of power in that they were absolving themselves, to some extent, of responsibility for that decision and could therefore not be blamed if it worked out badly for the group as a whole. Or, in the case of Roger and Darius, it could be argued that they chose to interrupt and insist on certain rules of process merely to exercise the informal power they possessed as longer-term residents.

This assertion is supported by the belief held by quite a few residents of Cedar River that the informal social structure that existed and was adhered to at Cedar River was a "natural hierarchy". (As was explained in Chapter Two, the quality of sociality was emphasised over the structure of social relations). Natural hierarchy, Arthur explained to me, is "a model of there being natural leadership and natural followership. And that if we are paying attention to ourselves and to the environment that we are in, we can pretty easily figure out who provides leadership in a particular aspect of community life or [Cedar River] operations" (Interview Sept. 5, 2007). Burke and Dan, two community members, expressed a similar sentiment when they described themselves as naturally "alpha males", which meant that they could make their viewpoints heard by the community more easily than others (Interviews Sept 7, 2007 and Sept. 6, 2007, respectively).

Thus, it becomes clear that the disjuncture between the egalitarian ideals, which the use of consensus decision-making allows the residents of Cedar River to

strive for, and the reality of the power imbalances that exist among residents, were to some degree being reconciled by ideas about the 'natural' order of man and society. But more importantly, the consensus process itself worked to mask the disjuncture, as it allowed residents to experience themselves as participants in an egalitarian organisation, while providing enough 'wiggle room' for certain residents who unofficially wielded more power to make use of that power. This point will become clearer as we move on to examine the effect of the organisational restructure that occurred during the course of my fieldwork.

The Re-Structuring Begins

Approximately five months into my fieldwork at Cedar River, a Visioning session was held. This was the community's annual session and they had chosen to hold it at the start of the year they were planning for, as opposed to their usual time near the end of the previous year. I had been invited to join the group for their four day meeting, provided that I take on the role of note-taker during all of the whole group discussions and decision-making processes. On the second day of Visioning, while we sat wrapped in blankets and sipping cups of tea to ward off the winter cold that was all too present on the other side of the yurt walls that sheltered us, Arthur, the organisational coordinator for Cedar River, introduced his idea for the restructuring of decision-making processes to the group. Arthur's presentation was the first major topic to be considered in this Visioning session, and was a compilation of all the ideas he had been considering over the previous year for transforming Cedar River into a more effective, and legally sound, organisation. He made it clear that his interest lay both in improving the organisational structures of Cedar River's non-profit educational centre *and* the quality of life for residential community members.

Arthur handed around some documents which gave a brief explanation of each of the changes he could foresee comprising the restructure. The central document was the one that set out his plan for a "revised hierarchy" of decision-making and "decentralised oversight" of Cedar River activities. The revised hierarchy portion suggested that the Board become more active in setting policy that affected the legal and financial aspects of Cedar River, while the decentralised oversight portion suggested the formation of standing committees that would be responsible for running distinct areas of Cedar River life. Another document listed

the "ways of being" part of the community and detailed the level of participation, rights, privileges, and autonomy that was granted to each category of person that might enter Cedar River land. A third document set out some possible implications of adopting these new structures and processes.

It was Arthur's hope that his suggestions could be discussed in greater detail during one of the main decision-making portions of the Visioning session. When Arthur completed his presentation, those in attendance broke into small groups and briefly discussed their initial impressions of Arthur's suggestions. The group I joined, it later turned out, was representative of the larger whole in feeling enthusiastic about creating more efficient decision-making processes and granting individual residents greater responsibility for the areas of Cedar River life that they were most involved with. Subsequently, a reconsideration of decision-making processes became one of the four major issues to be discussed during the remainder of Visioning. The move towards "decentralised decision-making", as it was known by community members, was later refined into a detailed structure and agreed on by consensus at a two day Visioning meeting one month later.

The Emergence of Guilds and …Bureaucratic Management

The new organisational structure was adopted in piecemeal fashion, with the first major shift being the creation of six guilds[11]. The guilds divided Cedar River into discrete areas of oversight so that the members of each guild could assume all decision-making responsibilities for their given area. The original six guilds created were as follows: land and garden, maintenance and infrastructure, kitchen and hospitality, educational services, community, and administration and development. As might be expected, there were some issues which involved more than one area, which then required decisions from multiple guilds.

The guilds made decisions by consensus and guild decisions were posted online for other members to review. While Core Group, and later the Council of Guilds (Core Group's refashioning), acted as an oversight and problem-solving forum for the guilds, individual community members were also able to question or dispute a decision made by a guild of which they were not a member via a formal complaint at Intention Circle. Theoretically, therefore, the ultimate power still

[11] 'Guild' was the creative or fancy name residents chose to signify 'standing committee'.

remained with the entire community membership; in practice, some guild decisions slipped by unnoticed, resulting in policies that some community members felt they had not agreed on. Furthermore, some guilds were inevitably more powerful due to the nature of the decisions they were making, and these guilds were generally comprised of those members whose job positions placed them at the top of the newly forming (bureaucratic) structure. Membership for each guild was determined first by the area in which a resident worked at Cedar River, then by areas in which residents were known to have relevant skills, and lastly by areas that were of interest to the resident. In practice, residents rarely attended guilds that were not part of their formal work commitments, with the exception of Community Guild, which was not particularly linked to formal non-profit work.

I attended as many guild meetings as possible, which was not difficult considering that they met for about two hours either once a week or, more usually, once every two weeks. After a few months of attending guild meetings, I began to recognise an interesting trend in behaviour which seemed to be occurring in each the various guilds. Each guild, while keeping the defined roles and general guidelines for conduct in consensus decision-making the same as it had previously been at Cedar River, began to develop certain meeting practices of their own. For instance, the members of the guild that was set up to oversee all the educational programmes offered at Cedar River initiated a regular practice at the beginning and end of each meeting, during which participants would simultaneously raise their hands up over their heads and shake them as if to invoke some higher power, while calling out "welcome spirits" or "thank you spirits", respectively. This practice took the place of the ritualised act of "calling in" and "calling out", which occurred at every decision-making meeting. Another guild, the one responsible for event hospitality and communal kitchen operation, integrated a regular practice of "checking in" into their meeting schedule. This practice, thought to bring individuals "present", was similar to conventions used at meetings associated with Cedar River's personal growth programme. But it was not standard for decision-making meetings.

In one sense, the diversity that arose between guilds was evidence of the diversity of beliefs, values and morals held by residents. Clearly this diversity was being masked by the rituals and role-playing deemed appropriate in meetings of the

former structure. As Schwartzman (1989) notes, meetings act as "sense makers and social and cultural validators", but they can work to maintain certain practices that are ontologically prior to the individuals to whom the practices become attached (p.43). In the new structure, the presence of alternative values was able to make itself known by virtue of the fact that residents had been newly empowered to assume roles in a group with no established norms for operation, precisely because the guilds were created to enact change. However, the diversity in guild meeting practices was also indicative of a division that was growing between the residents of Cedar River. This division became more and more obvious as time went on and the guilds took on more solid identities.

The division I suggest here can be illustrated by referring back to the example above regarding the practices of the educational services guild and those of the hospitality guild, respectively. In the first example, by reducing the "calling in" and "calling out" ritual to a quick "welcome spirits", the guild members appeared to be streamlining their activities. The meetings became about accomplishing stated work-related objectives, such as implementing policies, and the emphasis on group process was diminished. On the other hand, the introduction of the "checking in" in the hospitality guild meetings suggests a greater emphasis being placed on group process and less concern for the efficient accomplishment of work-related objectives. To be clear, I am not stating that the educational services guild abandoned the desire to make decisions by way of a process that reflected those values, such as equality, trust, respect and so on, thought to be consistent with consensus decision-making and neither am I suggesting that the hospitality guild were failing to accomplish their work-related objectives. Rather, I am arguing that, given the autonomy, the educational services guild (for example) began to function more like a department within a bureaucratic structure, focussing on task-oriented efficiency and 'rational' decision-making while the hospitality guild became ever more process oriented (See Herzfeld 1992 for a discussion of the characteristics of bureaucratic systems).

Mode of Social Organisation and Identity

The new organisational structure, including the guilds, Core Group/Council of Guilds, Intention Circle and the Board that was growing in executive power, was originally largely supported by community members as a way to make decision-

making more efficient. However, it came to be the focus of a major communal struggle between "heart-centred" and head-centred folks when the new system began to visibly include rigid bureaucratic structures. Although I was not present to witness a breaking up of the Cedar River community, I am aware that, soon after I left the community, a large portion of community members decided to leave, as they felt that living at Cedar River was no longer a context in which they could experience their everyday lives as meaningful. This exodus can reasonably be linked to the struggle between the beliefs, values and morals of residents desiring a mostly non-hierarchical, participatory mode of social organisation and those of residents desiring some form of bureaucratic system.

At a community-organised question session attended by people from outside the community who were interested in Cedar River as a possible home, one long-term member, Ted, stated that the biggest change he had seen in the community over his time as a resident was watching Cedar River go from a place that was focussed on "open heart communication" to one that was focused on "professionalisation". Although Ted seemingly said this without judgement, it was not uncommon to hear the complaint from those residents that considered themselves "heart-centred" that Cedar River had begun to focus too much energy on becoming "professionalized".

The criticism that was implied by stating that Cedar River was becoming too focussed on "professionalisation" was that the identity of Cedar River was being changed. Those that made this criticism feared that the introduction of rigidly hierarchical bureaucratic structures would both alter the moral/ethical focus of Cedar River and the nature of communal sociality. According to this fear, if Cedar River were to become a bureaucracy, then it would wind up just like the rest of American society with a rule-making body that was indifferent to the needs of individual community members, thereby denying them their chosen identity. Moreover, interpersonal relationships would no longer be framed by an ethic of intimacy, but would instead be framed by the role which one inhabited in the bureaucratic structure. Arthur and others who were champions of the organisational restructuring process were aware of this criticism. In fact, before the restructure was even agreed to, Arthur publicly shared his belief with community members, and myself, on multiple occasions, that the new structure would require a "culture shift". However,

Arthur and the other enthusiasts seemed not to associate the introduction of bureaucratic structures with either the demise of egalitarian ideals or the impossibility of realising their personal and communal goals, thus continuing to recognise Cedar River as a context for experiencing their lives as meaningful.

It becomes possible, then, to recognise the creation of certain identities which result from the community's chosen form of social organisation. We can see that the self that was expressed in decision-making meetings at Cedar River was intelligible relative to the organisational structure that was being re/created through those meetings. While Intention Circle, in the old structure, worked to reinforce certain values, such as equality and inclusion, that were consistent with the Cedar River consensus process via those that took part in the meetings, the guilds worked to strengthen a different set of values, consistent with the level of autonomy that was a defining feature of the new structure. In the guilds, while decisions were still being made by consensus and for the good of the community, value was being placed more on who had the experience, knowledge and skill to make a suggestion. Furthermore, guild decisions were then being acted upon in a structure that had newly empowered an executive branch that was not inclusive of the entire community membership. Therefore, those community residents that strongly identified with the beliefs and values expressed through the old organisational structure felt threatened by the possibility that the values expressed through the new structure would both deprive them of their claim to a certain egalitarian identity and render Cedar River incompatible as a context for experiencing a meaningful life.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a detailed look at the types of decision-making meetings that took place at Cedar River in order to give the reader a sense of the established organisational structure that existed during the first part of my fieldwork. I argue that meetings, being the primary context in which organisational matters are discussed, also provide a space for residents to negotiate and realise their beliefs, values and morals in regard to social organisation through taking part in the 'process' of consensus. I then described the formally defined roles that gave each meeting its form within the consensus decision-making process in order to demonstrate how inhabiting these roles allows residents to identify with the mode of social

organisation implied by the values that underlie consensus decision-making. The mode of social organisation implied by the values of equality, inclusivity, trust and common good is something akin to egalitarianism. I therefore argue that through participation in meetings, residents come to identify themselves as members of an egalitarian community, though for some residents Cedar River's chosen consensus process supported a "natural hierarchy" characterised by ad hoc leadership, which was essentially a way of characterising the obvious disjuncture between the ideals and the practices associated with consensus at Cedar River. The identification as egalitarian, and even naturally hierarchical, contributes to the experience of meaningful life creation among residents, as it explicitly pits the mode of social organisation in operation at Cedar River against the imagined Western mainstream, characterised by individualist interests and bureaucratic indifference.

However, as the story of the restructure illustrates, the experience of self and identity in decision-making meetings at Cedar River, and thus the experience of life as meaningful, was contingent on the chosen organisational structure. As the structure began to be experienced as bureaucratic, community members were forced to assess the link between social organisation and identity. It was felt by some residents, the "heart-centred" folks, that a change in organisational structure heralded a change in the quality of sociality, and thereby a change in values; whereas other folks felt that the quality of sociality need not change with a change in structure and, as such, the values that promote egalitarianism would persist among community residents. In the end, this resulted in the decision of some residents to leave Cedar River, as they were no longer able to experience Cedar River as a context where meaningful lives, as conceived of by said residents, could be led.

Chapter Four

Environmental Discourses: Debating Environmental and Social Processes

In the previous two chapters, the focus of analysis has been primarily limited to ideas and experiences relating to human interaction. In this chapter, and Chapter Five, I turn my gaze back to look at the ways in which Cedar River residents were conceptualising and enacting relationships between themselves and all aspects of their environment, particularly the non-human elements. Cedar River self-identified as a community that was "committed to working towards sustainable living by integrating permaculture principles into our land and our lives" (Anon: Document handed out as part of the introduction to permaculture during COP). While permaculture was clearly the recognised discourse through which human-environment interaction was supposed to be understood at Cedar River, other environmental discourses were subscribed to by both the community-as-a-whole and individual community residents.

This chapter explores the ways in which these sometimes competing environmental discourses came to be understood as meaningful for particular residents and, in the case of permaculture and nature protection specifically, for the community-as-a-whole. Narrative analysis is the main methodological tool used in this chapter, as this provided the most appropriate method for accessing information on the motivations behind certain residents' ways of engaging with their environments. Using Milton's (2002) work on the valuing of nature and natural processes to explain some of the processes involved with the attachment of meaning to one's environment, I ultimately ask how subscription to a particular environmental discourse affects residents' knowledge of themselves as actors in the world.

This lends itself to the larger project of the thesis by examining how intentional community is a context that is more conducive to the theorisation, negotiation and operationalisation of environmental discourses than most other contexts in the industrialised West which, in turn, allows residents to experience their lives as meaningfully engaged with the world around them. I suggest that this is primarily due to the fact that intentional communities, provided that they consider

environmental relations to be of communal importance, both foster concerted effort on the part of residents to enact practices according to certain beliefs and values, as well as provide a bounded environment within which the enactment of such practices result in recognisable outcomes that encourage the perpetuation of theorisation, negotiation and operationalisation.

The analysis is based on the assumption that at least some part of why each resident chose to live at Cedar River is informed by environmental beliefs, values and morals, yet explicitly recognises that these beliefs, values and morals were forever changing as part of the everyday experience of living at Cedar River.

Permaculture and Native Plants

It was about two months into my fieldwork and I had been desperate for a chat with Dan, the land steward at Cedar River. He was an intriguing figure, quiet and contemplative, and seemingly confident in his knowledge of the land that came under Cedar River's ownership. Up until this point, I had felt somewhat intimidated by the presence Dan commanded and found that my words escaped me every time I attempted to make conversation with him. My feelings of intimidation were not, however, in response to any power or position held by Dan, as he was very much an equal – as much as anybody can be considered equal - in relation to the other community residents. Rather, I was somewhat awestruck by Dan's demonstrably abundant knowledge of ecological systems, clearly more developed than any other residents' knowledge of such things, and felt I did not know how to enter into conversation with him on a topic I knew so comparatively little about. Nevertheless, on this particular morning, I was feeling more assured of myself, as the previous night's casual conversation with Dan in the hot tub left me feeling like we could, in fact, relate to each other comfortably.

As the dining hall emptied upon the completion of breakfast, I sat down next to him and waited to be noticed. After some brief conversation about the pleasures of studying anthropology, which my presence had obviously prompted, I found myself listening to Dan's thoughts concerning a permaculture and native plant conference he was organising with Roger for the coming Spring. My interest was piqued. This conference sounded like just the sort of event I had been hoping to get involved with

in order to explore the relationship between environmental discourse, and residents' conceptions of themselves, that seemingly existed at Cedar River. I listened on.

Dan explained that he and Roger had decided to organise a conference that would bring together a group of regional "plant enthusiasts" who were currently divided between two camps: those who promoted the use of native species for land management purposes, and those who promoted permaculture. Dan saw himself as a member of the permaculture crowd, seeing as it was the knowledge he had gained through adherence to the principles of permaculture that he used on a daily basis to maintain the lands under his care. Roger, on the other hand, was more akin to the native plant crowd, as he admittedly had "a terrible memory for non-native plants (except certain garden varieties), and little interest… in changing that" (article written by Roger 2006:23, Cedar River publication). Furthermore, his role as the Nature Center coordinator had him intimately involved with both conservation activities and the documentation of the natural history of Cedar River.

However, Dan continued to explain, neither he nor Roger believed such a division was useful, as it was clear that both groups could benefit from each other's knowledge, as was exemplified by the mixing of knowledge at Cedar River. Dan then went on to describe how he, for instance, took great care to learn about the Native American land management strategies that were traditionally used in the area of Cedar River, and how such a practice was advised by both permaculture and native plant promoters. This last comment led Dan to the conclusion that perhaps ethnobotany and native or traditional land management practices were topics that could be used as a starting point for getting conversation going between the two groups at the conference.

While the conference, which took place months later, turned out to be an exciting and thought-provoking weekend event, it did not actually prompt much conversation among Cedar River community members, in general, regarding personal or communal environmental beliefs and values held. I suspect this was due to the fact that most residents were not actually involved with the conference and those that were involved, such as Dan and Roger, were the folks who spent most of their time at Cedar River working with the land, and thus made their beliefs and values known on a more regular basis. However, the initial conversation with Dan

did lead me to think about the importance of environmental discourse and, in particular, how the discourses one subscribes to affects one's experience of acting in the world. I therefore began to take note of the environmental discourses circulating in everyday activity at Cedar River and I questioned residents as to their beliefs, values and morals regarding human-environment interaction during interviews. The remainder of the chapter is a reflection on what I discovered. Three Cedar River residents – Dan, Eldin and Roger – feature prominently in my analysis, as they displayed their environmental beliefs, values and morals more visibly than others in the community.

Environmental Discourses

A discourse is a "framework that includes whole sets of ideas, words, concepts, and practices" and provides "the general context in which ideas take on a specific meaning and inform particular practices" (Benton and Short 1999: 1). Environmental discourses, more specifically, articulate "arguments about the relationship between humans and the natural environment" (Muhlhausler and Peace 2006: 458). The environment, as it is understood throughout this thesis and seemingly by the residents of Cedar River, is both a social construct open to interpretation and contestation, and a 'natural' backdrop that exists in relation to all human activity. These terms are significant for understanding the analysis made in this chapter, as the environmental discourses circulating at Cedar River form the focal point of analysis.

The two main environmental discourses promoted by Cedar River as an educational centre were that of permaculture and nature protection. This was formally done through the permaculture and eco-village design courses offered at Cedar River, Nature Center tours, and other events held on Cedar River land which promoted one or both of these discourses through interaction with some of the resources on the land designed to facilitate environmentally-specific learning. However, a simple visit to either the Cedar River website or the property itself was enough to get a glimpse of how human-environment interaction was being conceptualised at Cedar River.

Permaculture

Permaculture was initially at the centre of my research interests, hence my attraction to Cedar River - a community that presented themselves on their website as a group of people that were actively engaging with the principles and ethics of permaculture in their daily lives - as a field site. The word 'permaculture', initially coming from an amalgamation of 'permanent' and 'agriculture', but expanding to include a notion of 'permanent culture', can be taken to mean various things. In its strictest sense, permaculture is a set of design principles that may be used to plan for sustainable human settlements (See Mollison and Holmgren 1978; Whitefield 1993; Holmgren 2001). Most of the original publications concerning permaculture focus on agricultural planning and human-environment interaction; however, as the permaculture concept was extended, the principles also grew to include ideas pertaining specifically to human social relations thought to promote sustainable livelihoods.

The term "permaculture" evokes an explicit ecosystemic framework for envisioning human-environmental relationships; therefore global environmental concerns such as climate change and natural resource depletion, as well as localised concerns such as soil nutrient depletion and water quality, become motivating forces for those who subscribe to the principles and ethics of permaculture (Mollison and Holmgren 1978; Holmgren 2001). These concerns, as well as a whole host of additional concerns, were evident in the everyday activities of most Cedar River residents, and were particularly present in residents' use of language relating to human-environment interaction. To a lesser degree, nature protection also proved itself to be a significant discourse in the production and reproduction of knowledge relating to human-environment relations at Cedar River.

Nature Protection

Nature[12] protection, for the purposes of this thesis, is understood to encompass the ideas expressed by both nature conservationists, generally concerned with the conservation of natural resources, and nature preservationists, who are generally

[12] The use of the word 'nature' in phrases such as 'nature protection' or 'nature center', refers to those aspects of the living environment which are non-human. While I realise that 'nature' is a contested term, I feel I must use it to reflect both the use of the term by informants, as well as its use in popular discourse.

concerned with the preservation of wilderness. Milton (2002), who has spent much of her professional career researching those dedicated to nature conservation and preservation, includes both aspects of nature protection in her explanation of the motivating forces behind nature conservation: "the protection of biological diversity (or 'biodiversity': ecosystems, habitats, species and subspecies) and landscape (scenic beauty)" (p.5). There is a long history of nature protection in the United States, dating back to the mid-19th century, resulting primarily from both a nostalgic yearning for the untouched wilderness which had only just recently been all but fully conquered and settled, and a rational desire to make the best use of available natural resources in the wake of rapid industrial growth (Benton and Short 1999; Carter 2001). The U.S. National Parks system, as well as organisations such as the Sierra Club, represent the lasting and, indeed, growing interest in nature preservation and conservation among members of the U.S. public.

Nature protectionists often refer to themselves as subscribing to either an anthropocentric view of nature - that is, valuing nature for what it can provide for humans – or an ecocentric view – valuing nature and natural processes intrinsically. Thus, the protection of native flora and fauna, restoration of old growth forests and the maintenance of trails for access to the aesthetic qualities of wild spaces, for instance, represent the range of concerns that might be attributed to nature protectionists. However, as Roger, the coordinator of the Nature Center at Cedar River pointed out, humans are in no way separate from nature and adopting a so-called ecocentric view of nature only works to create a sense of disjuncture between humans and their natural environments (Interview Sept. 2, 2007). In other words, Roger was suggesting that the concept of ecocentrism is flawed. My own point of view in is agreement with Roger, and thus the work of the Nature Center, which allowed residents and visitors easy access to a large portion of the vast acreage of Cedar River land through its maintained trails while also serving as an educational experience through the labelled plant species and (more recently) regular photo updates of fauna spotted on the land, is analysed in terms of the value ascribed to nature because of the perceived benefit to human beings.

In addition to the work of the Nature Center, the communal interest in nature protection was also made evident through the regular homage paid to 'Mother Earth'

for the provision of food and other basic resources. It was not uncommon for residents to give thanks for the abundance of the land during mealtime circles and most earth-centred holidays, such as those that recognise solstices, equinoxes and full moons, were celebrated with some ritual that expressed gratitude and wonderment towards nature and natural processes. Additionally, various 'beings' of the land were always called on to participate in decision-making meetings at Cedar River, as these 'beings' were thought to have some part to play in the ultimate success of Cedar River as a functioning whole. This view of the natural world as sacred can be seen as an additional motivator for residents to take an interest in nature protection (see Milton 2002). Therefore, although less explicitly articulated as a subscribed to environmental discourse at Cedar River than that of permaculture, nature protection, and the various ideas associated with it, was implicitly a motivating and uniting force for residents.

Peak Oil

There is one additional environmental discourse that was circulating at Cedar River which I have chosen to highlight due to the strength of conviction displayed by the main promoter of this discourse. This discourse is popularly known as 'Peak Oil'. Peak Oil refers to the various beliefs associated with "the point in time when the maximum rate of global petroleum extraction is reached, after which the rate of production enters terminal decline" (http://www.zymetis.com/change/: last accessed 06/06/09). Depending on the particular way in which the scientific evidence has been presented, subscribers of the Peak Oil discourse are led to believe that we have recently hit peak oil production, or we are just about to. In either case, it is believed that, as a result of the inevitable decline in oil production, many lifestyle alterations are required of those residing in heavily oil dependant nations in order to survive into the future. For some, these alterations are understood as a sort of 'down-shifting', wherein individuals consume less material goods in order to reduce one's dependency on oil. For others, the lifestyle changes required are thought to be more radical.

While the majority of Cedar River residents did not subscribe to the Peak Oil discourse, one fairly vocal resident, Eldin, was quite passionate about it. Eldin repeatedly made efforts to address his peak oil concerns both for the benefit of

himself and his family through personal lifestyle choices – such as installing a composting toilet in his cabin - and for the benefit of Cedar River through the circulation of information relating to peak oil preparedness for those community residents that were interested. Although Cedar River did not promote themselves as a community dedicated to addressing the concerns associated with Peak Oil, the community-as-a-whole was nonetheless interested in down-shifting and experimentation with alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power. Therefore, the Peak Oil discourse subscribed to by Eldin was seen by the majority of residents as commensurable with the community's larger goals, though remained a marginal discourse, I suspect, due to the sometimes scaremongering rhetoric associated with it.

While this brief discussion of three prominent environmental discourses circulating at Cedar River begins to create a picture of the ways in which residents were conceptualising and actualising human-environment relations, in order to understand the role of environmental discourse in the everyday lives of Cedar River residents, and the community-as-a-whole, we must explore how such discourses come to be seen as meaningful for those who subscribe to them.

A Permaculturalist is Born

At the time of my fieldwork, Dan would have been somewhere in his forties or early fifties. He was the father of two children, both of whom lived in the community part-time, as Dan and the children's mother had been separated for quite some time. Socio-economically speaking, Dan would probably have been considered lower middle class. He was very well educated and earned enough money from his landscaping business, and his teaching and land steward responsibilities at Cedar River, to support himself and his children comfortably, though seemingly had very little expendable income.

Dan had been living at Cedar River for nearly four years. He had, however, been involved with Cedar River since very close to its inception, as he started using Cedar River as a site for teaching permaculture design courses as early as 1990 and continued to be involved with various projects on the land over the years until finally making the decision to move to Cedar River after realising he was enjoying himself

more when he was there, than when he was not. Dan's main motivation for moving to Cedar River was the fact that he could teach permaculture and other ecologically-based skills there, as his love of teaching was often hindered by his dislike of institutions. However, he discovered through taking part in the personal growth courses on Cedar River property that the community aspect of Cedar River life was also something he really enjoyed and needed.

I had known from previous conversations that Dan had been familiar with permaculture for nearly 30 years, as he began learning about the principles and ethics involved with permaculture design shortly after *Permaculture One* was published in 1978. However, the beginnings of his involvement with permaculture were revealed through a short autobiographical narrative which told of the childhood and young adult experiences that Dan believed had led him towards permaculture, and subsequently the lifestyle that he currently benefited from.

Dan's story began with being the fortunate recipient of parents who encouraged his interests in natural history, gardening, cooking and generally working with his hands. This, he believed, set him on a path in which rural living skills were equally important as the types of skills one learns in a typical American school, evidenced by the fact that two of his four siblings were also involved in gardening and animal husbandry. Dan also happened to grow up in a house that abutted a bit of land that he described as containing "very varied topography…nice microclimate and very varied exposures to slope and soil type" (Interview Sept. 6, 2007). According to Dan, this provided an ideal environment for exploring and learning about the world.

When Dan was done with school, he took a trip to Central and South America, during which he became aware of the scale of ecosystemic diversity, as well as the variety of crops that were grown as local alternatives to crops he was familiar with in the U.S. Dan explained this trip as a defining period in his life, from which he returned and took up an interest in ethnobotany. Upon taking the advice of a well-known ethnobotanist, Dan decided to pursue his interest in the relationship between plants and humans outside of academia. This is when he discovered permaculture. Dan attended a weekend event that was comprised of workshops, each focussing on individual components of permaculture systems. He was struck by a presentation on the versatility of one plant in particular and decided to open up the

first nursery in the Pacific Northwest U.S. that was dedicated to growing and selling this plant. Dan has continued to be deeply involved with plants, permaculture and foodstuffs ever since.

Discovering a Love of Native Plants

Most of Roger's narrative came to me in the form of an article he had written himself for a publication, created by the residents of Cedar River, used to introduce people to Cedar River and the work that they did. Roger begins by telling the readers that he embarked on his self-education in ecology as a youngster through spending time being active outdoors among the various elements of the 'natural' world. He alludes to the fact that appreciating nature through the experience of being in it was supported by his family, as he mentions that he is the child of "a long line of musicians, priests, intuitive gardeners, and writers/teachers (2006:21, Cedar River publication). Roger moves on to tell the readers that he soon became interested in books about edible wild plants and, after a couple years at a liberal arts college, eventually enrolled in an environmental education programme that travelled the country in order to educate students on diverse ecosystems and the "land-based peoples" that had occupied said ecosystems at one time or another (ibid: 22). This experience inspired Roger to "live as close to the earth as [he] could", which he first attempted through moving to a Native American Reservation where he lived for over a year (ibid: 22). On the reservation, Roger became acquainted with agriculture, an interest he continued to pursue throughout my time at Cedar River.

In the twenty or so years since leaving the Native American Reservation, Roger has continued to foster an array of skills which he describes as "ways of connecting with the earth and with other people, of participating in the evolution of ecological culture that seems necessary for our own species' survival and flourishing" (2006:22, Cedar River publication). For a time immediately before moving to Cedar River, Roger lived at another rural intentional community, which he described to me in an interview as seemingly informed by "a paradigm that nature is perfect and human beings are flawed" (Interview Sept. 2, 2007). While this worked for Roger in the first part of his time there, he later chose to make the move to Cedar River, as he "saw that there's more to life than trying to figure out how to try not to be a human being as much as you possibly can" (Interview Sept. 2, 2007). Thus,

after moving to Cedar River and spending years being involved with the gardens and various educational programmes, Roger finally pushed for the founding of the Nature Center which allowed him strike a balance between his love for experiencing a closeness to nature and natural process, and the scientific classification of nature that would allow himself and others to better understand their native environments. With this in mind, his first project as the Nature Center coordinator was to make and place engraved signs with the common name, family name, genus and species of various native flora around the property. In my time at Cedar River, Roger was continuing to expand this collection, as well as educating himself and others about the local species of birds.

Valuing "Things in the World"

Dan's narrative suggests that early childhood interaction with the exceptionally interesting and diverse environment within which he spent most of his time, coupled with the fact that his parents encouraged certain types of interaction, can be understood as responsible, at least partly, for how he came to know himself and the world around him the way he did. In particular, Dan noted that his experiences began to take on significant meaning when he came to understand why knowing about soil structure, microclimates, and so on could be useful for human settlements. After his trip to Central and South America, Dan discovered that knowledge of microclimates could, for example, inform the use of alternative crops which benefit humans and their environments alike by maintaining diversity.

Roger's narrative is somewhat similar, in that he suggests that his early experiences in nature were positive and the people he surrounded himself with encouraged him to learn ever more about nature and natural processes. In fact, after his experiences with the environmental education programme, Roger came to value knowledge of nature and natural process as a central organising principle for his life. Eventually, this knowledge took on new meanings when, through founding the Nature Center, Roger discovered that he could expand and enhance his own and others experience of nature through labelling the native flora on Cedar River property, thus incorporating a more scientific approach to learning about ecology.

Milton (2002) argues that we, as humans, attach meaning to nature and natural processes due to the experience of emotion we receive from engaging with

our environments. She suggests that it is in the process of attaching meaning to aspects of our environment that we come to value "things in the world" and that this process is intrinsically an emotional one (p.100). Moreover, Milton points out that "[w]hat each individual comes to value most will depend on the context in which they learn about the world, the kinds of personal experiences they have, the ways in which they engage with their fellow human beings and with their non-human surroundings" (2002: 108–109). The examples of Dan and Roger are instructive as they suggests that, because their respective experiences with nature and natural processes throughout their lives were understood as positive, and these experiences were consistently supported by those people that surrounded Dan and Roger, they were able to develop a deep appreciation for, and knowledge of, ecological processes. Furthermore, the constant reinforcement Dan, in particular, mentioned receiving at Cedar River in his role as the land steward via displays of deference and gratitude, prompted him to continue valuing his knowledge of nature and natural processes ever more deeply.

A Changing Perception

Dan and Roger's life's experiences prior to arriving at Cedar River were somewhat unique for Cedar River residents. In both daily discussions, and more in-depth semi-structured interviews, it became apparent to me that most of the other Cedar River residents had come to understand environmental discourse as meaningful in a slightly less fluid manner. In other words, unlike Dan or Roger, who described their experiences as having a fairly linear trajectory towards the direction they both chose, most of the other residents described a period of recognition or awakening to the world in a new light as the catalyst for their current way of understanding human-environment relations. The following narrative, taken from an interview with a Cedar River resident, Eldin, whom I would describe as quite proactive in his approach to life, illustrates this alternative experience.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Eldin was living in Eugene, Oregon, a place that is known throughout the U.S. as being a hub for people who are interested in alternative lifestyles and politics (Milton 2002, for instance, makes mention of the logging protests that have been a somewhat regular occurrence in Oregon in her discussion of popular sites of environmentalism). During this time, Eldin began

"awakening to the state of our world" via the activism that was present in Eugene (Interview Aug. 24, 2007). This was also the time period during which Eldin became aware of the presence of intentional communities scattered throughout the U.S. Eldin left Eugene to pursue other dreams, during which time he met his partner and eventually came to live, for some time, in Missoula, Montana. According to Eldin, Missoula had also become a politically active space due to logging disputes in wilderness areas and campaigns aimed at protecting buffalo. It was here that his partner also became aware of environmental concerns. Eldin described this period of his life as a time when he and his partner started to realise "that we were a couple trying to live together and support each other in a world that we were rapidly realising was kind of falling apart…It was unstable, to say the least, and looking to get more unstable" (Interview Aug. 24, 2007).

After a few more years of travelling and exploring the U.S. for suitable places to live and raise children, Eldin and his partner settled on Cedar River. Upon reflection, Edlin described this decision to move into community as something he felt like he *should* do, rather than something he really dreamed of doing. In fact, in our interview, which took place approximately two and a half years after he moved to Cedar River, Eldin stated that he still felt living in a community was a 'should'. He gave the following explanation for this feeling:

> Almost daily, on some level, I have a very difficult reconciliation that must occur between my understanding of peak oil and everything that's related to that. You know, our species, reaching a peak in the production of its most vital resource ever. You know, getting to a reconciliation with that and feeling so overwhelmingly obliged to pay attention to that and prepare for that.
>
> (Interview Aug. 24, 2007)

Eldin explained that he became aware of the reality of peak oil in 2001 through reading articles written by OPEC, the International Energy Agency (international body that advises on energy policy), and the Energy Information Administration (a U.S. government body). This knowledge about the state of global oil reserves convinced Eldin that an end to growth was imminent and civilisation would soon be entering a period of decline. This realisation solidified his desire to live away from urban centres and within a region that had good potential for food production. Again, finding a communal setting within which to re-establish his and his family's

way of life appeared to be the most appropriate option. Eldin admitted, however, that he was initially somewhat reluctant about the move to community because of the hard work inherent in making a living off the land, yet it was clear to him that it had to be done, as humanity in general was going to have to redefine its relationship with its environment.

It is clear from this narrative that Eldin, though admitting to having been aware of political and environmental issues throughout his adult life, came to see environmental discourse as meaningful due to the acquisition of convincing knowledge regarding the future risks that humanity faced if they did not reduce their dependence on oil. The set of issues, summed up under the heading 'Peak Oil', proved itself compatible with Eldin's own perception of his environment to the extent that he began to make decisions based on his new-found peak oil understanding of human-environment interaction.

In analysing the formation of social movements, Johnston and Klandermans (1995) note that the perception of a crisis often precipitates the mobilization of action. While that may be true, neither Eldin nor most of the other Cedar River residents I spoke to identified themselves as a member of a social movement. However, the residents of Cedar River can be understood as agents who pursue a meaningful life through 'the life of action' (Pihlström 2007:7). Pihlström describes such individuals as those who believe that "the world ought to be made better, and life more meaningful, by acting in it" (p.7). Thus, I argue that by moving to Cedar River, each resident was taking some form of action, whether individually or as a family, to change the ways in which they were interacting with their environment based on some perception of environmental risk.

Environmentalism and the Perception of Risk

Ulrich Beck, in his renowned work, translated into English as *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1992), claims that Western society has entered a period of 'reflexive modernity' (later renamed the "second age of modernity" in order to clarify his intentions (Beck 2000)), which is characterised by the notion of a 'risk society'. Beck (1992) explains his position thus: the politics of most Western nations is becoming increasingly focussed on risk management in order to address the ills produced by the industrialisation of society. As such, a reflexive gaze on the

previous century has allowed for the transition to be made from an industrial society to a 'risk society'. This risk society, according to Beck, goes hand-in-hand with the processes of globalisation, and therefore presupposes the processual 'cosmopolitanization' of citizens (Beck 1992, 2000).

One effect of the cosmopolitanization of citizens is a redefinition of their relationship to the state so that politics, used to address ever-increasing shared risks, creates cross-frontier community building and solidarity (Beck 2000). Yet, as many public risk concerns have yet to be actually legitimized by the state, a 'sub-politics' also emerges in order to engage the general public in choices pertaining to risk (Beck 1992; Dryzek et. al. 2003). One arena of political debate that has proven itself increasingly more significant over the last forty years or so on the topic of risk, is 'the environment'.

In the mid-1960s, a new brand of concern for the environment spread across the Western world, most notably in the U.S., Western Europe and Australasia (Carter 2001). The likes of Rachel Carson (1962) and Paul Ehrlich (1968) took it upon themselves to popularise ecological mishaps and scientific evidence concerning the environmental dangers industrial society posed. According to such analyses, it was becoming fairly clear that the rapid growth and industrialisation of the previous century had depleted an enormous amount of fossil fuels and had caused many other resources (water, air, soil, etc.) to become polluted or degraded. This resulted in a mistrust of Western science and technology among some portion of the Western public (Beck 1992; Rubin 1998; Jamison 2001; Carter 2001; Dryzek et. al. 2003).

Consequently, science was being used to inform a critique of the technology that it had also devised, and this information was used to form a powerful political platform against dominant notions of technological innovation, namely "modern environmentalism" in its many guises (Touraine 1985; Jamison 2001; Milton 2002; Dryzek et. al. 2003). With the emergence of this 'modern environmentalism', came "the idea of a global ecological crisis that threatened the very existence of humanity" (Carter 2001: 4). However due to the lack of recognition of the economic and political, as well as moral implications of their suggestions, Carson and Ehrlich effectively created an environmentalism inspired by fear and based on ideologically motivated interpretations of scientific data (Rubin 1998). Nonetheless, they also

provided the hope of salvation through personal transformations in the way individuals related to nature. This later fed into the politics of environmentalism which, inspired most notably by the Club of Rome report entitled *The Limits to Growth*, by the late 1970s had taken on a global character with an actual policy agenda aimed at enacting change on a wider scale.

In the case of Cedar River, the environmental issues that took on significance for most residents, and therefore had the greatest impact on how they came to view their environments, were those that were relevant to their cultural experience as Americans (Milton 1996, 2002). Production, distribution and consumption of foodstuffs were concerns for nearly every Cedar River resident due to the fact that these processes have become largely centralised across the U.S. and therefore could be perceived as a cause for uncertainty and fear in terms of quality and security. Overuse of fossil fuels was another common concern among Cedar River residents, generally illustrated to me by residents stating that there was a serious over-reliance on personal automotive transport in America. The destruction of habitat and biodiversity also concerned a large proportion of residents who were enthusiastic hikers and generally 'nature' lovers. They had been witness to the local forests being devastated by unsustainable logging practices or had read the countless news stories of increasing desertification in California caused by uncontrolled urban sprawl. These, as well as other environmental concerns, arose, at least in part, due to the residents' ability to gaze reflexively on the socio-cultural norms and values with which they had been raised, and render them incompatible with their life experience, in particular their exposure to ever-increasing environmental risks via the media, their own education and personal interaction with their environments.

Thus, if we accept that "underlying the dynamics of the development of any environmental issue is a series of conceptions, often implicit, about the nature of the risk to humans" (Brosius 1999: 284), then we can begin to understand how the 'risk society' of Beck's (1992) analysis comes to inform the relationship that members of a given society have with their environments. Even if concern for the environment is expressed, as it often is by nature protectionists (Milton 2002), as a concern for the intrinsic value of 'nature', ultimately anthropocentric concerns can be found embedded within. This suggests, in keeping with Beck's analysis, that the reflexive

gaze environmentalism aims at the Western industrial complex is a consequence of entering a new period in history which is distinguished by new risks, new economies, new politics and a new society (Beck 2000).

For Cedar River residents, this generally meant that their environments began to be understood as both in need of human management - in order to control the impact of human activity on the 'natural' environment and provide the resources needed for human survival - and as precious resources that require preservation in order to protect biodiversity and leave ecosystems intact for future generations. Thus, the environmental discourses of permaculture and nature protection, as described above, dominated. Not all residents shared the same understanding as to what type of land management was needed or how to go about it, as each resident had come to their current view on human-environment relations through different experiences and moments of awakening. However, all of the residents' understandings concerning the relationship between humans and their environments, in their broadest sense, were brought together by permaculture, and to a lesser degree nature protection, as permaculture seeks to design sustainable human settlements while, in accordance with the ideals of nature protection, leaving a certain portion of land as wilderness.

Interestingly, while differing opinions existed among residents as to the potential of various wild and cultivated spaces, ultimately Dan's knowledge of ecological systems was highly respected, and thus he was usually trusted and deferred to for opinions on any big decisions. Dan even expressed to me how surprised he was that the community repeatedly put faith in his knowledge and got behind him on multiple large land management projects (such as a huge eco-forestry tree removal project a couple years previous). A site committee existed for those who were interested in discussing land use ideas and concerns, and a land and garden guild was created as part of the decentralised decision-making restructure which also provided a forum for discussion of such issues. Nonetheless, I never witnessed, nor heard about, any major debates between Cedar River residents as to how to manage human-environmental relations for the community-as-a-whole. I took this to mean that Dan, being the appointed land steward, was essentially unconditionally trusted to make the right decisions for Cedar River, thereby lessening the need for lengthy and

abundant meetings regarding detailed environmental issues. In other words, when Dan made a suggestion to the community regarding some sort of land management issue, consensus was generally found in favour of whatever Dan suggested.

As for individual choices, residents were left to make decisions for themselves, provided they did not impinge on the choices of others. Nevertheless, I would argue that the idiomatic move from intentional community to eco-village during my time at Cedar River was evidence of a united residential belief that new ways of interacting with the world were required in order to weather the multiple risks created by changing environmental conditions.

Meaning and Context

Seeing as Cedar River residents had agreed to have a land steward and the appointed land steward's role was to oversee the actualisation of various land management strategies that had as their goal permacultural solutions to sustainable human settlements, we must ask how the land management strategies operationalised on Cedar River land contributed to residents' experience of their lives as meaningful. I am suggesting that the residents of Cedar River effectively made their daily interactions with their environments meaningful through association with the dominant environmental discourses in circulation, particularly as such interactions were seen to contribute to the land management strategies in operation.

Milton (2002) argues that context and experience shape what people come to value. In other words, it is through repeated interaction with one's environment, that one begins to make sense of the world around them (Milton 1996, 2002; Ingold 1992, 2002). On any given day during the course of my residency at Cedar River, I was the recipient of at least one, but usually multiple, piece/s of information regarding some phenomenon that had been observed or experienced on Cedar River land that day. Perhaps Denise (an eleven year old child) had noticed that the first of the blackberries had ripened, or Ted (a thirty-something long-term resident) had mentioned that there was frost on the ground in the early hours of the morning, or Jenny (a twenty-something newcomer) had announced that the full moon was shining outside. I realised that I, too, was paying attention to these things, having been the first to notice that one of the chickens was not moving at it should or feeling a sense of wonder at the giant fallen tree that was certainly not on the path previously. Each

of these experiences was an act of learning about the environment, and each experience took on meaning or value for the person who had experienced it.

Ingold (1992, 2002) calls the act of learning through experiences in one's environment 'direct perception'. According to Ingold's explanation, which is based on the work of the psychologist, J.J. Gibson, 'perception' is a process that occurs as a result of action in the world and as such it is not mediated by culture. Perception, he argues, is distinct from 'interpretation' which *is* culturally determined, but is not strictly required in order to interact with one's environment (Ingold 1992; Milton 1996). In her examination of the anthropological understanding of culture and its relation to environmentalism, Milton (1996) agrees with Ingold that "[a]t least some of what we know, think and feel about the world comes to us directly through our experience, in the form of discovered meanings"; however she suggests that such meanings or perceptions are, to some extent, culturally defined (1996: 62). More to the point, Milton proposes that culture "situates us within the world", thereby allowing our interactions with our environments to take on the form of meaning that they do (1996: 63).

Milton's formulation of human–environment interaction begins to illuminate not only how the experiences I described above have come to take on the meanings that they have for particular residents at Cedar River, but also the importance that residents seemed to attach to the regular sharing of experiences with their environment. On a daily basis, the residents of Cedar River made their way through the woods or past the barn or over the river in order to get to work and complete the tasks they set for themselves of a day. Daily, they experienced the elements of their environment through the act of walking or riding their bike through it, and this experience undoubtedly allowed the residents to discover things about their world. However, this daily journey happened on land that was part of their home and was intentionally managed in order for the residents to live in accordance with their beliefs, values and morals. Therefore, like Dan's realisation that his knowledge of microclimates could inform the use of alternative crops which benefit humans and their environments alike by maintaining diversity, the experiences residents had through their interactions with their environment became significant as they came to

be seen as signifiers for what the values, beliefs and morals inherent in Cedar River's mission statement aimed to achieve, namely sustainable livelihoods.

The point that I am trying to make here becomes easier to grasp when looking at the specific ways in which residents' daily activities were understood in relation to the goal of realising sustainable livelihoods. Each resident, for the most part, organised their daily schedules around the paid work they did for the non-profit, community service responsibilities, and personal activities that they participated in, either on Cedar River land or elsewhere. Depending on the formal job that was taken with the non-profit and the other roles people chose to take on in the community, not everyone seemingly played an active part in helping to realise the communal values on human-environment interaction. However, on closer inspection, it was my experience that to some degree everyone took part in some activity, either on their own or with a group, which allowed them to feel as if they were realising their beliefs and values regarding human-environment interaction.

Even the most unlikely resident, Darius, who was never seen in the gardens or helping out on the land in any way, and who often used the heating while leaving windows open, had a little peach tree in front of his cabin which he cared for. When I asked him why he seemingly gave so much attention to this tree, he replied that it was a reminder for him of the abundance that existed all around us and he felt it was important to help nurture that abundance for the community. Another resident, Ted, explained how he also came to realise his goals for appropriate human-environment interaction through his work in the community. He worked as part of the team responsible for infrastructure maintenance at Cedar River and his first major project after moving there was to renovate a cabin in order to make it energy efficient and thus a demonstration of permaculture ethics. Such projects, many years later, according to Ted, helped to keep him living at Cedar River because he felt as if the experimentation with permaculture that was persistently occurring at Cedar River due to the community's commitment to enacting sound land management strategies was producing knowledge that all people were going to need in the future, and being part of that gave him a sense of purpose.

On the other end of the spectrum, residents like Dan and Roger seemingly spent their entire day involved in activities that appeared meaningful because they

were working to perpetuate Cedar River's goal of creating sustainable human settlements. Dan was the official land steward at Cedar River, was a recognised permaculture instructor, and a well-respected designer who had been practicing for much of his adult life. Roger had been gardening for Cedar River for many years, had gardened for other communities before that, and was consistently involved in learning about and documenting the land's natural history through his role as the Nature Center coordinator. It seems plausible to suggest that Dan and Roger chose to make actualising their beliefs and values regarding their environments their primary daily activity because they had both spent a significant portion of their lives acting in the world in a context in which the meanings attached to their actions had taken on great significance. Dan did mention that he had forgotten how valuable his knowledge was before moving to Cedar River because he had spent so much of his time around other permaculture designers, gardeners, farmers and plant enthusiasts. Roger, for his part, described his dedication to the gardens thus:

> You know, like in a healthy culture everyone would be involved in food growing. And I don't understand why people would drive off…to do something else for entertainment or whatever and they're just expecting the food to come in. And I understand, also, people feel they put in their hours in their regular job and they need some fun or whatever, but it just doesn't align with my personal values to be that disconnected from the source of our sustenance here.
>
> (Interview Sept. 2, 2007)

What I have suggested through these examples, therefore, is that Cedar River, by virtue of being an intentional community with a mission statement that includes explicit beliefs, values and morals regarding human-environment interaction, provides a context and opportunities - by way of land management strategies – that is conducive for residents to experience their own work in the world as meaningful.

And yet, the degree to which work on permaculture and nature protection projects make a meaningful contribution to both the ambient society and humanity, in general, is somewhat contestable. Certainly the fact that much of the work that Dan and Roger, and various other Cedar River residents, partake in on the land is used for educational purposes makes an argument for its utility. As I argue in Chapter Six, education is a vital component of any plan that is working towards the realisation of more sustainable human settlements. Nevertheless, one could hardly argue that permaculture and nature protection on such a small scale, and carried out

in such a relatively isolated manner, has the potential to significantly impact society at large much beyond the regional network of individuals who are involved in business or personal relationships with Cedar River residents. Small scale projects, such as those being carried out at Cedar River, are essentially experiments in design that, unless translatable to larger scales, remain enclaves in an ecologically inefficient world of design.

That said, I am aware that both Dan and Roger, along with Maryanne who had lived at Cedar River longer that anyone else, actively sought to broaden the scope of the potential impact of Cedar River's projects by encouraging the formation of relationships with local politicians and other civic organisations. In fact, Dan and many of the permaculture teachers involved with Cedar River's eco-village and permaculture courses were involved in 'sustainability' projects in a few of the regional cities, doing everything from planting edible landscapes to rebuilding local community centres. Projects such as these involve multiple levels of community organisation and government, thus possessing a greater ability to influence societal norms more fully.

Furthermore, the recent shift in Cedar River's focus, from that of intentional community to aspiring eco-village, suggests an attempt to address the issue of knowledge transfer between the community itself and the surrounding region. Jonathan Dawson, who is the executive secretary of the Global Eco-village Network in Europe, states that eco-villages "tend to see themselves as being in service to a wider cause, generally framed in terms of ecological restoration, strengthening community, nurturing the local economy and/or deepening spiritual insight" (Dawson 2006: 23). These goals are not so different from those of intentional communities, such as Cedar River; however, "a core function of eco-villages is to develop new ideas, technologies and models that it then shares with the wider world" (ibid:36). Thus, in the case of human-environment interaction, as I implied at the end of the "Environmentalism and the Perception of Risk" section, I argue that the eco-village model may provide an even more conducive context than that of intentional community for individuals to experience their work in the world as meaningful.

Identity and Selfhood vis-à-vis Environmental Discourse

As my own discovery of Cedar River, via an internet search of "permaculture intentional community", reiterates, the environmental discourse subscribed to by a group of people can have an enormous impact on how that group and the individual members of the group are perceived before a face-to-face encounter has ever occurred. The association between environmental discourse, and in particular the land management strategies prescribed by such discourses, and identity has been widely discussed in anthropology, particularly in relation to 'indigenous knowledge', or what is referred to by Milton as "the myth of primitive ecological wisdom" (1996: 109; Ellen 1986). Milton (1996) suggests that the misleading belief among anthropologists and environmentalists alike that small-scale societies, such as hunter-gatherer communities, are somehow closer to nature than those that modify their environments more drastically, stems from a belief in the romantic tradition of the all-natural 'noble savage'. Subsequently, in popular discourse "the myth" became the cornerstone of much environmentalist thought which, according to Milton, is one of the reasons why it persists.

However, the focus of the anthropological discussion over the last few decades has been aimed at debunking "the myth of primitive ecological wisdom" (Ellen 1986; Bird-David 1998 [1992]; Richards 1993). Milton (1996) argues that the best way to do so is through analysing the range of cultural perspectives that exist on human-environment interaction and seeing how compatible these perspectives are with current environmentalist thought and ecological wisdom. Upon doing so, Milton concludes that some non-industrial societies possess environmentalist perspectives and adhere to ecologically "benign" principles, and some do not. According to her, this implies that, in order to better understand why some societies are proving themselves more environmentally sustainable in the long run, it is more important to attempt to gain knowledge of a society's values, morals and general understandings of the relationship between humans and their environments than it is to argue about what societies are more likely to be environmentally benign (1996: 133 - 136).

Milton's argument is particularly attractive as it seemingly takes note of the fact that judgements regarding 'sustainable' or 'benign' environmental practices are largely dependent on the scale of a given population and cannot, therefore, be

inferred from out-of-context environmental ideology (Ellen 1986). Moreover, her analysis suggests that there is indeed a connection between identity, as invoked through reflection on values and morals, and modes of interaction with the environment. However, Milton finds this connection through analysis of 'insider" reflections from the informants themselves, rather than "outside" labelling of what is unknown and other.

More recently, Barnard has suggested that a particular 'mode of thought' can be applied to those whose way of life is "epitomised by the[ir] range of subsistence activities and attitudes towards them", irrespective of what society each person is a member of (2002: 6). For instance, those persons who value sharing of resources above accumulation would be considered as possessing a foraging mode of thought. In this same article, Barnard uses identity as an example of one of the indicators for a particular mode of thought. Again, environmental discourse and land management strategies, of which subsistence activities are a part, are associated with identity, suggesting that, at least to some extent, concepts of identity and, by extension selfhood, are tied up with how a group and members of a group, understand their relationship to their environment.

Identity, Selfhood and the Role of Narrative

Before going any further with the analysis of how identity, and by extension selfhood, is recognised and experienced vis-à-vis environmental discourse, it is necessary to explain in more detail both what I mean by identity and selfhood, the relationship between them, and the role of narrative in coming to understand this relationship. As I stated in the Introduction to this thesis, I understand the identity/ies of a given subject to be "multiple, produced within discourse and potentially contradictory" (Kondo 1990:36), yet crucial for the production of meaning. Our identity/ies arise in relation to our various social locations, and signify our beliefs, values and morals. Most importantly, our identity/ies should not be understood as constitutive of self, but rather as contributing to the experience of self. Self, then, is understood "as the totality of what an organism is physically, biologically, psychologically, socially and culturally" (Quinn 2006: 362). Thus, selfhood is experienced and constituted through a variety of processes which include,

not only those associated with identity, but additional bodily and emotional processes as well.

Narrative, I am suggesting, provides us with an important avenue through which we might access the processes associated with both identity formation and the experience of selfhood. Therefore, this chapter has centred on narratives related to the significance of various environmental discourses in the lives of a selection of Cedar River residents, as the processes associated with identity formation and the experience of selfhood are inextricably linked to meaning-making (Mattingly and Garro 2000). The term 'narrative' has been used by various disciplines and has taken on a multitude of meanings in relation to its analysis; however, for the purposes of this thesis, I understand narrative to refer to "first-person accounts by respondents of their experiences" (Riessman 1993:1). Narratives are constructed by individuals, often multiple individuals, and are subject to interpretation, which makes their exact use in social scientific research somewhat contestable. Consequently, anthropologists, sociologists, linguists and a variety of other social scientists have developed various analytical tools for the purpose of extracting what is valuable from narratives (Mattingly and Garro 2000). For my part, I have chosen to use narrative in a typically anthropological sense – that is, to investigate the relationship between "individual's stories of personal experience and cultural knowledge" (Mattingly and Garro 2000:5). Through the analysis of individual narratives, we can gain knowledge of how individuals in a particular cultural context come to attach meaning to their experiences through shared understandings, particularly if we pay attention to how our narrators are interpreting events (Riessman 1993:5).

It has been suggested that narratives are inherently moral (Riessman 1993:3; Mattingly 1998; Aristotle 1970 cited in Mattingly and Garro 2000:11), as they "have something to say about what gives life meaning, what is inspiring in our lives, what is dangerous and worth taking risks for" (Mattingly and Garro 2000:11). If we agree, like Milton (1996), that reflection upon one's morals and values constitutes a process through which identity is recognised, then the construction and sharing of one's life story through narrative reveals something of how and why one claims certain identities for oneself, or how and why certain identities have become attached to oneself (Riessman 1993:2). Furthermore, the construction and telling of narratives

can reveal one's emotions, one's bodily reactions to certain events, and the social and cultural significance one attaches to certain events – in short, narratives can reveal many aspects of the self as it is understood by the narrator and as it is created in the moment of narration (Peacock and Holland 1993; Riessman 1993; Becker 1997; Mattingly and Garro 2000; Ross 2003:102). Hence, the analysis of residents' narratives concerning the significance of various environmental discourses in their lives allows us to understand the processes through which identity/ies and selfhood come to be recognised and experienced vis-à-vis said discourses.

If we think back to the narratives of Dan, Roger and Eldin which were related above, we come to see how each individual's story was able express the ways in which each one of them recognised themselves in relation to certain identities. We witnessed a certain causal flow between one experience, and the meaning that the individual attached to it, and the next, all the way up to the moment in which the narrative was related. However, in relating these narratives, I only succeeding in revealing how certain environmental discourses became meaningful for certain individuals, thus encouraging said individuals to assume certain identities and recognise themselves in various ways. I have yet to say something specific about the recognition of a shared identity, and by extension a similar experience of selfhood, vis-à-vis environmental discourse among Cedar River residents. The following example of Arthur, relayed in narrative form as constructed by both myself (as witness) and Arthur, exemplifies these processes.

During the time of my fieldwork, a large proportion of Cedar River residents made an attempt to gain knowledge of the workings of permaculture design at some point during their residency in the community, either by participating in one of the community-run courses or working alongside Dan or another knowledgeable resident. In fact, many interns came to live in the community by way of one of the permaculture courses offered at Cedar River. Through learning about permaculture design, the residents were effectively coming to understand the bigger picture of what was involved with the land management strategies in use on Cedar River property. As one resident put it, taking part in the permaculture course taught him how to apply systems theory to the whole of the Cedar River environment. This

knowledge of permaculture also provided a common language with which residents could speak about the ways in which they understood themselves and added to the sense of group identity felt by residents of, and perceived by visitors to, Cedar River.

One example of this use of 'permaculture language' comes from an interview with Arthur. Arthur was a middle-aged man who had been living at Cedar River for just about a year when I arrived. He was extremely active and involved with nearly every aspect of the community, as he had taken on the organisational coordination job upon moving to the community. Arthur had worked in "the environmental business" for a good portion of his professional life before moving to Cedar River, and had also been involved with the Northwest Earth Institute, an organisation that develops programmes for the purposes of educating groups and individuals about ways to create a more sustainable future. Thus he was very familiar with ecological concepts and had easily integrated the knowledge he gained from the permaculture course he took at Cedar River into his understandings of the world. On this particular occasion I had asked him to describe what he understood as "mainstream culture" and how this differed from the culture he repeatedly referred to as existing at Cedar River.

> Mainstream culture for me is represented by giving our lives over to institutions that are not really in alignment with natural flows and ways of being. So it's about flying in the face of sound ecological management of our affairs...through all the ways of making a living and the financial structures and residential layout of settlements, communities, cities... Clearly the availability of energy has made it so we pretty much shape things because it's inexpensive and easy to do that. So we shape our settlement patterns, we shape our institutions, we shape the ways that communication happens, we shape all of these different basic needs that we feel as human beings into something that is heavily energy dependent. So we've disconnected a basic, essential quality of ourselves as human beings by handing it over to these institutions that do that for us. So for me, mainstream culture is about losing touch with who we fundamentally are. And, [Cedar River] and its culture is maybe anywhere from a little bit to significantly better as far as being in touch with who we fundamentally are. And closer in terms of technology...providing for those needs. The fact that we can walk out and shake a peach tree and eat peaches is a very different experience than so many people in the mainstream have and that very simple difference and many, many differences like that, that are just that simple, have a profoundly different effect on how we think. And so I think that [Cedar River] being much more isolated and insulated makes it so that we at least have more of an

> opportunity, more of a proximity, to natural processes and how natural processes and flows impact our inner landscape.
>
> (Interview Sept. 5, 2007)

For those who are unfamiliar with permaculture, it is clear that this statement is at least informed by some manner of ecological thought, due to Arthur's repeated references to natural flows and his mention of "sound ecological management". However, this brief statement is filled with language and understandings that are informed by the principles of permaculture. Permaculture is based on an ecosystemic model, meaning that designs are created in order to account for all energy flows into and out of the system, with the goal of producing 'closed-loop' systems that require a minimal amount of energy input while resulting in the maximum output (Whitefield 1993; Holmgren 2004). With that knowledge, it becomes possible to see that Arthur's mention of mainstream culture having built itself around cheap energy is a reference to the inefficiencies inherent in much oil or coal powered technology. His focus on human settlements and institutions is another indication that his assessment is informed by permaculture, as permaculture is, in general terms, a method of designing sustainable human settlements. Finally, Arthur's use of the phrase "inner landscape" is taken directly from permaculture and is used to refer to the biological energy flows of humans (Holmgren 2004).

Yet, what is more telling about this statement is that Arthur specifically relates his beliefs about human-environment interaction to his conception of himself. The dichotomy he sets up between mainstream and Cedar River culture, and analyses in permacultural terms, is based on "being in touch with who we fundamentally are". For Arthur, living somewhere like Cedar River, where one is able to pick peaches from a tree and eat them right away, allows humans to attain essential knowledge of the self that we are otherwise cut off from in "mainstream culture". Arthur never explains precisely what this knowledge is, yet he alludes to the fact that it is controlled by flows of energy and we can extrapolate from that that Arthur is referring to what occurs psychologically inside a person when they pick a peach for eating, as opposed to buying one from the shop.

Arthur's explanation of mainstream culture, in relation to Cedar River, explicitly suggests the concept of "mismatch" (Gluckman and Hanson 2006).

Mismatch is a paradigm wherein an organism is thought to be ill-suited to its environment due to either a shift in the constitution of the organism or a rapid change in the organism's environment (p.11–13). In either case, the relationship between an organism – in this case humans – and his/her environment is seen to be central to the organism's experience of quality of life. Consequently, if mismatch occurs, meaning is eventually lost and the self is ultimately jeopardised. Accordingly, Arthur is suggesting that in order to experience his life as meaningful, his conception of self must be aligned with his conceptualisation and actualisation of human-environment interaction.

Furthermore, I am arguing that residents' beliefs about human-environment interaction operated on two levels, in terms of the role these beliefs, values and morals came to play in each resident's conception of him/herself. On one level, because Cedar River, as a community, subscribed to permaculture as a discourse and used the associated principles and ethics to manage the land, an identity similar to that which is perpetuated by the romantic belief of the noble savage, was assumed by the group as a whole by virtue of supposedly living in a way that is more aligned with ecological flows of energy. This identity is reinforced on a daily basis by other residents, as well as visitors, who use 'permaculture language' and other ecological terminology to talk about themselves in relation to their environments. In fact, the 'permaculture language' I refer to is similar to New Age terminology, such as 'energy' and 'forces', which is often criticised for alluding to scientific and philosophical rationales without actually having an empirical basis (Hanegraaff 1996), yet nonetheless acts as a distinct identity marker for members of the New Age community. This process of identification, whereby acting as part of the group at Cedar River is equated with being ecologically aligned, provided residents with one form of socio-cultural justification for understanding themselves as such.

Yet, on a second and more personal level, the opportunities that were available to residents of Cedar River who were interested in realising the values, beliefs and morals they held in regard to human-environment interaction were such that those values, beliefs and morals could be exercised daily in their work on the land, in the kitchen, in their sleeping quarters, and pretty much anywhere else on the property. This was due to the fact that Cedar River is an intentional community

which adheres to certain land management strategies informed by permaculture and, to a lesser degree, nature protection. As such, these daily activities became the mechanism through which Cedar River residents learnt to be ecologically and socially sustainable selves (Quinn 2006). In other words, the act of tending a peach tree on one's daily walk home from work, which eventually results in the production of a big juicy peach that is ripe for picking, teaches one to become the self that is conceptualised through the values attached to growing one's own fruit.

Conclusion

This chapter made a shift from exploring human social interaction, to exploring the beliefs, values and morals held in relation to human-environment interaction and the social and environmental processes that accompany such interaction. As such, attention was given to the environmental discourses that were circulating at Cedar River in order to make explicit the underlying assumptions that informed much human-environment interaction. However, mere description of environmental discourses does not tell us how such discourses come to be seen as meaningful for those who subscribe to them. Therefore, a discussion of three residents' experiences relating to nature – as expressed in narrative form - followed, which suggested that context played a large part in how both Dan, Roger and Eldin came to view the respective discourses of permaculture, nature protection and peak oil as meaningful.

Moreover, Edlin's narrative highlighted the common thread that existed amongst most Cedar River residents in regard to human-environment interaction, namely the perception of environmental risk. Noting this perception allowed us to see how permaculture acted as a unifying discourse for residents, as it seeks to design sustainable human settlements through land management strategies that also prescribe the preservation of some wilderness. I argued that the land management strategies, generally put in place by Dan, but agreed to by the community-as-a-whole, provided a practical means through which residents' daily activities could be realised as meaningful. Work on, or observation of, these strategies provided an experience of the values, beliefs and morals professed through permacultural principles and thus the Cedar River mission statement. The work of the Nature Center, to a lesser degree, acted in a similar fashion.

Ultimately, I argued that subscription to a particular environmental discourse affects one's knowledge of oneself, as it contributes to the construction of identity (See Tsing 1997). In the case of Cedar River residents, adherence to the values, beliefs and morals outlined by permaculture and, to a lesser degree, nature protection, worked to construct selves that were understood as both socially and ecologically sustainable. Furthermore, because these values, beliefs and morals were being realised in the context of intentional community, and were therefore reinforced by the group and resulted in noticeable changes in quality of life, residents were able to experience their interactions with their environments as meaningful. The following chapter explores one particular domain of human-environment interaction at Cedar River which was thought to have a particularly large impact on quality of life in general, namely food-related practices.

Chapter Five

Food and Food-Related Practices: Mediums for the Realisation of Identity

It cannot be denied that food is an integral component of daily life for all human beings. Whether one is focussed on producing, obtaining, preparing, avoiding, distributing or consuming it, food inevitably enters into each individual's realm of consciousness in a daily manner due to it being the primary source of energy that sustains human life. Yet, as has been pointed out by many a social scientist (See Levi-Strauss 1958, 1966; Douglas 1966, 1972; Mauss 1967; Sahlins 1972; Barthes 1979; Meigs 1984; Harris 1985; Lupton 1996; Counihan and Van Esterick 1997; Caplan 1997; Pottier 1999; Scholliers 2001), food is not simply treated as a necessity for survival by most individuals, but is imbued with meaning and given significance through a mixture of historical and socio-cultural processes. Within any given context one is likely to find a variety of individual beliefs and perceptions in regard to food and food-related practices, as well as some agreed upon norms and values which are understood by the larger group in question.

At Cedar River, while there were some visible norms in regard to food-related practices adhered to by the residents and some discernable trends in food-related ideas, in reality the values and beliefs attached to such practices proved almost as numerous as the residents. Contrary to the general perception among new arrivals that *all* food at Cedar River was going to be "organic" and "vegetarian", presumably due to those descriptors being used in promotional materials to describe the food served to guests of the community-run conference centre[13], both certified and uncertified 'organic'[14] food only made up the *vast majority* of communal food, and meat made a frequent appearance on the plates of many individuals. This seeming contradiction - between the words used to represent food-related practices

[13] Subsequent to my research, which took place between September 2006 and November 2007, Cedar River began offering non-vegetarian options to conference guests.

[14] Foods that are grown without the use of chemical pesticides, herbicides or fertilisers, while also remaining GMO-free can be considered organic even if they do not have official certification from a recognised body. In fact, some farms choose not to seek certification for various political reasons. Additionally, it is often the case that uncertified organic foods adhere to a stricter quality standard, as most organic certifications are not 100%.

on the one hand and my experience of participating in food-related practices at Cedar River on the other - provides a good starting point from which to question what certain labels like "organic" and "vegetarian" actually signify for the people involved with Cedar River, while also prompting an exploration into the diversity of meanings, values and beliefs attached to food-related practices.

'Organic' Vegetarian Cuisine

Cedar River, having the legal status of a non-profit educational organisation, used their conference centre facilities as the primary source of outside income[15]. The income generated by the conference centre was used to support the intentional community in continuing to live and work towards their social, ecological and educational mission. Being a guest of the conference centre was the chief way in which people were introduced to Cedar River; therefore the offerings of the conference centre were meant to be at least notionally aligned with the values, beliefs and aesthetics of the residents of the intentional community so as to provide an accurate picture of everyday life at Cedar River to guests.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the conference centre run by Cedar River residents advertised their meal offerings as both "vegetarian" and "organic". These two labels have been closely associated with counter-cultural or alternative lifestyles in the U.S. since the 1960s and, arguably, are still recognised as such today (Belasco 1989; Pollan 2006). People visiting Cedar River, either to attend a community-run Educational Center event such as the two month long eco-village and permaculture course or as part of a conference being held on the land, presumably did not come in order to experience a conventional, for-profit-like retreat or conference centre. Even if an individual had carried out the most cursory investigation of the facilities, they would be sure to recognise that Cedar River aimed at introducing individuals to alternative lifestyle approaches. One simple and convenient way of doing this was through the food that was provided.

Yet, Cedar River was not only a conference centre, but was home to approximately fifty human-beings during the time of my fieldwork. While the residents of Cedar River supported the conference centre via their commitment to

[15] During the time of my fieldwork, a large proportion of community income was generated from fees paid by members of the residential community.

their mission statement and through a variety of other activities, they did not necessarily align their personal food-related practices with that of the formal face of Cedar River. This is not to say that many, or even most, food-related practices that I observed individuals partaking in at Cedar River would not be classed as 'alternative' or 'non-conventional'. Rather, they are practices that perhaps lack the common currency of 'organic' or 'vegetarian' and therefore require a more in-depth explanation as to the beliefs and motivations behind them in order to elicit the recognition as 'alternative'. For reasons that can be understood as political, economical and historical, individuals at Cedar River displayed behaviours that are distinctive of recent trends within alternative food movements, such as food relocalisation and freeganism (defined further on). These practices speak to an individualised sense of the embodiment of beliefs and ethics via food-related practices in a way that is perhaps more radical in the present-day context than that of vegetarianism or choosing organics. The following chapter aims at unpacking why this is the case.

The Emergence of a Countercuisine

Beginning in the 1960s - and growing out of the Haight-Ashbury hippie scene of San Francisco and the politically fertile Berkeley atmosphere - the 'modern environmental' movement took shape as a significant force for social change in the U.S. (Belasco 1989; Carter 2001; Pollan 2006). One defining aspect of this 'modern environmentalism', which set it apart from the conservation-focused environmentalism of the early twentieth century, was the emerging emphasis on 'ecology' from within the movement (Belasco 1989; Pepper 1996; Pollan 2006). Ecology, very briefly defined, is the study of organisms and how they interact with each other and their environments. The new focus on ecology allowed the modern environmentalists to frame their intentions, not only through the lens of perceived biophysical problems, but also via the language of perceived social ills due to the fact that ecological science places an emphasis on the interconnection of all organisms.

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, is popularly credited with making this connection between ecological thought and environmental thought coherent to the masses, as it addresses the supposedly detrimental effects of DDT use on both bird populations and humans, thereby illustrating the interconnection

between human use of agricultural pesticides, avian reproduction and human health. Another publication from the same year, which inspired the incorporation of social concerns into environmental rhetoric, was Murray Bookchin's *Our Synthetic Environment*. Bookchin argues that human-induced environmental damage and increased urban social organisation in the U.S. are linked to individual illness and ill-being, and concludes that industrial civilisation must be altered in various ways in order to achieve a healthier balance between humans and their natural environments (1962). Of course, it could also be argued that the urbanisation of society has led to improvements in individual health and well-being for reasons such as the availability of clean water or centralised waste management facilities. However, this argument would not be nearly as appealing to those interested in pointing out the negative aspects of industrialisation.

These publications, along with a variety of others from around the same time, point at the conventional food production and consumption practices in the U.S., as well as the industrialised social hierarchy that had come to characterise Western democracies, as significant facets of modern life that must be altered in order to achieve greater ecological balance. Subsequently, such publications called for a new structure based on decentralised systems to replace the current means of production and consumption (Belasco 1989; Bookchin 1962; Carson 1962). According to Belasco (1989), this was the beginning of the "countercuisine" faction of the modern environmental movement.

Countercuisine in the U.S. was originally characterised by foodstuffs that were produced in a non-industrial manner (i.e. without the use of artificial fertilisers or locally on a smaller scale) and could be classified as "preservative-free", "chemical-free", and generally "natural" (ibid; Pollan 2003; 2006). Vegetarianism and animal product avoidance was also linked to countercuisine due to perceived ethical and economic problems with livestock-raising in the U.S.; however, meat was tolerated and eaten by some subscribers who felt they did not need to give up meat completely, but could conscientiously consume it. According to Belasco (1989), foods that were not generally found on the table of the average American, such as Asian-inspired curries or Middle-Eastern grains, were also representative of the new

counter-cultural cuisine, as it demonstrated an interest in cultures and traditions from around the world.

As for how to obtain these foodstuffs, small whole and health food shops, as well as personal or local gardens and farms were the ideal providers. Finally, subscribers of the countercuisine also placed emphasis on how meals are cooked. Food that was prepared slowly and intentionally from raw ingredients, rather than reheated or hastily prepared from pre-packaged items, was seen as the ultimate meal. In addition, sharing food among friends, family and even strangers, was thought to contribute to the well-being of society.

Accordingly, rural communal experiments in the late 1960s and 70s provided the exemplary setting for the realisation of countercuisine ideals (Belasco 1989; Pollan 2006). As was stated above, individuals who subscribed to the countercuisine were interested in devising a new infrastructure of food production and consumption, while also living according to principles such as "voluntary simplicity" and "living lightly", all of which was being promoted through popular countercultural publications such as *The Whole Earth Catalog* (ibid). Communal experiments allowed individuals the opportunity to experience the realities of growing food 'organically' (i.e. without the use of artificial fertilisers), making meals from alternative ingredients and sharing food communally.

As has been pointed out by many an observer, this is not as easy to actualise as the idealistic vision makes it sound. Many skills are required of individuals in order to grow and harvest a diversity of foodstuffs, make appropriate connections to obtain additional foodstuffs, and prepare meals on a daily basis for a variety of individuals with complex beliefs and diet needs; and that is only one dimension of communal living. Nevertheless, I would argue that many communal experiments that were set up subsequent to the rise of countercuisine indeed held ideals, and adhered to certain practices, with regard to the production, preparation and consumption of food, similar to those described above.

Communally Supported Food-Related Practices

Such was my experience at Cedar River. I never heard the words "countercuisine" or even "counterculture" mentioned in reference to food ideology or practice at Cedar River, yet certain daily activities and observable norms were present which hinted at

an unbroken link with the countercuisine ethics developed in the 1960s and 70s. Most notably, there was a heightened level of consciousness around the types of foods community residents, and those that passed through Cedar River, supported through communal purchasing and consumption. During the length of my fieldwork, all community residents carrying the status of member or renter contributed one hundred dollars per month towards the purchasing of communal foodstuffs. Community purchased and produced foodstuffs made up the vast majority - if not the entirety - of most residents' diet, although some residents chose to purchase additional items, such as meat, specialty foods and cheeses to supplement their diets.

The items purchased on a weekly basis varied according to seasonal availability, community needs and the personal preferences of the individual/s in charge of making the food order. Local 'organic' food distributors were used to obtain most items (one of which was owned by a former resident of Cedar River) and the rest were either grown or produced on Cedar River property, purchased from local farms, dairies or neighbours, or bought from one of the healthfood/wholefood shops in the nearby city. No meat products were purchased and all but very few items (such as hot sauce) were either certified or uncertified 'organic'. At any given time there was a variety of 'organic' grains, legumes, sweeteners, raw fruit and vegetables, dairy products, eggs, spices, oils, flours, nuts, seeds, dried fruit, soy products, teas and canned goods available for communal use (with the exception of some "specialty" items which were rationed by the people in charge of the kitchen), as well as other miscellaneous items.

As far as I could discern, there was no official community policy on buying only 'organic' or chemical-free foods for the community. When I asked one resident who was intimately involved with the food ordering, she replied that she made food ordering choices based on what seemed most aligned with Cedar River's mission statement. Cedar River's mission statement does not explicitly state a commitment to 'organic' foods, but does declare that Cedar River seeks to focus on regional ecosystem food self-sufficiency and creating sustainable, ecologically and socially balanced cultivation practices. It would seem, then, that the individuals in charge of ordering, in conjunction with the community members' approval – or lack of disapproval – felt that their mission statement was being honoured most accurately

by purchasing 'organic' and, increasingly, local foods. In fact, for the duration of my stay, the creation of ever more local food connections was strongly encouraged by residents and they were often successfully made. Interestingly, while many residents did express some interest in whether or not new food sources were 'organic', I found that more visitors or program participants were concerned with the 'organic' status of foodstuffs.

In addition to a concern over the 'organic' status of food, there was also a concern shared by residents and guests alike with the actual ingredients and components of each meal. This manifested itself through standard practices such as making sure vegan (i.e. no animal-derived products) options were available at every meal, checking the food allergy and preference chart before cooking meals and clearly labelling products that some individuals chose to avoid such as wheat, soy, dairy, eggs and sugar in all communal food offerings. Moreover, it was considered standard to provide at least one cooked grain, one cooked vegetable, a source of non-animal protein and large amounts of raw salad-type vegetables at each lunch and dinner meal. This was thought to provide the most balanced vegetarian[16] nutrition for community residents.

The way in which food was prepared and consumed at Cedar River also speaks to the presence of a group identification with countercuisine ideology and practice. Breakfast, lunch and dinner were communally prepared and served Monday through Friday, except in special circumstances. Nearly every community resident, with the exception of a few people whose schedules simply did not allow for this, participated in a regular cook or clean shift in the communal kitchen as part of their agreed upon community service hours. Cook shifts for lunch and dinner were generally three hours long and handled by two individuals and breakfast cook shifts tended to be somewhat shorter simply due to the nature of breakfast foods.

Many residents expressed that they absolutely loved the opportunity to cook for the community each week, with one individual telling me that his weekly cook shift was what he looked forward to most. Cook shifts were generally lively times in the kitchen where the cooks listened to music, discussed some topic of interest,

[16] All food bought with communal funds and prepared for general community consumption was vegetarian during the time of my fieldwork. This decision was more to due with hygiene concerns in the communal kitchen, rather than a community-wide belief in a vegetarian diet.

experimented with new ingredients or recipes or participated in any array of social interaction with their cook partners and others present. Passers-by were usually happy to lend a helping hand if needed during shifts in order to ensure timely serving of meals and conversely, if asked, those who were just hanging about in the kitchen would readily leave during shifts so as to respect the hard work that cooks put into each meal.

When meals were served, a bell was rung that would call all individuals present on Cedar River land to the communal eating area to join a circle made around the serving table. The circle was an opportunity to sing a song, say words of thanks for the food provided, announce what was being served and make other important announcements. Individuals tended to eat either on the lawn or in the communal eating area, both of which were furnished with large tables that promoted socialising. All were encouraged to eat as much as they liked, while also being reminded to be mindful of those who may not have gotten their food yet. Each meal officially lasted one hour and individuals generally appeared to use the entire hour to enjoy their food, catch up with fellow residents and newcomers, and sometimes participate in a casual game or activity. When the meal ended, cleaning began and was carried out in much the same fashion as the cook shifts.

Food-Related Practices as Symbolic of Group Identity

The picture that I am trying to paint here is one in which the obtaining, preparing and consuming of food involves a great deal of time, sociality, and intention. This behaviour could be interpreted as the acting out of certain countercuisine beliefs described by Belasco (1989). Subscribers of the countercuisine were encouraged to "slow down" the process of preparing and eating each meal in an effort to get more in touch with the food being prepared, but also as a subversive act against the convenience-driven economics of U.S. society (1989: 51–52). Additionally, it was thought that placing more emphasis on the processes of food obtainment, preparation and consumption, rather than on the product itself, was a way to become more conscious of all that food represents within a given society (1989: 46–48). These processes include the act of sharing food. What is more, the countercuisine move towards improvisation and vegetarian experimentation also parallels the experience of deliberateness required by cooks at Cedar River who were expected to create

meals that took the variety of residents' special dietary needs and concerns into account.

It should be noted, however, that not all food-related practices at Cedar River were interpretable as 'counter' to mainstream practices. Some practices were simply continuations of what is generally found among the mainstream, particularly in relation to methods of food obtainment, food choice and variety, and (to a much lesser degree) convenience. For instance, some foodstuffs were still purchased at the supermarket, even if it was a supermarket that specialised in whole/healthfood. Therefore, these food purchases were continuing to support the mainstream financial market infrastructure. Additionally, foods like quinoa and coconut were purchased fairly regularly for community use. Such foods can only be sourced from other countries and thus have to travel very far to arrive on the plates of Cedar River residents. What is more, as I stated above, multiple food options were made available at each meal so that everyone felt there was something available that they could eat. Providing multiple food options and including foods like coconut in regular meals suggests a continuity with mainstream consumeristic/individualistic food-related practices, in that variety is being provided so as to maximise individual choice. Finally, foodstuffs such as yoghurt, which require certain preparatory processes to produce, were regularly purchased in prepared form, rather than taking the time to turn milk into yoghurt (though this was also done on a very small scale by certain individuals). This could be seen as a continuity of the mainstream tendency towards convenience foods.

Upon closer inspection, I suggest that these continuities seem best understood as instances of purposeful ignorance – in other words, residents were choosing to ignore the continuities with mainstream practices while simultaneously highlighting the differences. For instance, quinoa and coconut were eaten by residents particularly for their nutritional qualities and thus, while actively trying to make good food choices in terms of nutritional value, residents purposefully ignored that, in order to obtain such foodstuffs, one generally must source them from around the world and accept the transport costs that are involved. Another example can be taken from the provision of multiple food options at meals which, on the one hand, is understood by residents to be considerate of varying dietary needs and values; but,

on the other hand, could be seen as pandering to a certain mainstream obsession with individual choice. As for the purchasing of yoghurt, it was organic, bio-live and bought from a local supplier, which perhaps allowed residents to ignore that the local goats milk yoghurt made on the property could have been done on a larger scale, or local cow milk could have been sourced from which to produce yoghurt, thereby negating the need to purchase a prepared product.

Nonetheless, Cedar River residents had developed standard practices around food obtainment, preparation and consumption that, for the most part, stood in alignment with a countercultural identity that was created in the 1960s and 70s as part of general rejection of what had come to be perceived as conventional American food norms and values, as well as the political economy in which the foodstuffs were circulating. The acts of obtainment, preparation and consumption of food at Cedar River, therefore, as well as "the organisation, the taboos, the company, the location, the symbols, the representation, the form, the meaning and the art of eating and drinking" not only allowed individuals to acquire a sense of belonging to – or identification with - the group at Cedar River, but also provided a medium through which the appearance of a coherent group identity could be projected to those who were outside, or newly come to, the Cedar River community (Scholliers 2001: 7). What is more, this group identity could be understood by outsiders or newcomers as stereotypical of communal experiments in the U.S. due to the historical association between such countercuisine practices and communal living.

There is much evidence to suggest the instrumental place of food-related practices in strengthening a sense of group identity (Lupton 1996: 25). Foods that are commonly eaten within a particular country or region are understood by many as characteristic markers of the people themselves. It has even been argued that the "incorporation" of food into one's body is a symbolic act that parallels the incorporation of an individual into a group (Fischler 1988). Of course, a group identity is never as coherent as it appears on first glance. It is better understood as a collective form through which a person can assert some aspect of his/her own identity (Cohen 1994: 178). Using symbols such as "vegetarian" and "organic" in relation to the food offerings at Cedar River, or obtaining, preparing and consuming food slowly and intentionally, allows the community to invoke a general image of

alternative or countercultural lifestyles, but does not say anything specifically about the meanings that those symbols or acts take on for residents at Cedar River.

The next section of this chapter will address the beliefs, ethics, morals and motivations inherent in food-related practices at Cedar River, as they are experienced by residents. However, before I move on to discuss that, there is one final point about the identification with alternative lifestyles through food-related practices at Cedar River that is important to note. This has to do with the changing nature of food practices and preferences in U.S. society.

'Alternative' Becomes the New Convention

My argument thus far has been that the practices that have become norms at Cedar River in relation to the obtainment, preparation and consumption of food are linked to a historical association with one subset – namely countercuisine - of the countercultural social movement that arose in the U.S. in the 1960s and 70s. This association with countercuisine, and more broadly alternative lifestyles, has added to a sense of group identity for both residents of Cedar River and those who come to visit or are otherwise exposed to Cedar River. While this may be the case, it must be noted that many food-related practices, such as purchasing 'organic' foods or subscribing to a vegetarian diet, are becoming more conventional in the larger U.S. society. I use the word "conventional" here in a very intentional way, as it suggests routinised practices which are not formalised, but are understood as shared norms and expectations between actors in a particular social system (Vittersø et. al. 2005).

The term "organic" was adopted by the members of the countercultural movement in the 1960s and 70s not only to denote foods that had been produced without the use of synthetic chemicals – which was how it had been used since the early 1940s in the pioneering 'organic' gardening magazine *Organic Gardening and Farming* – but also to symbolise foodstuffs that were produced, distributed and consumed through systems that lay outside the industrial infrastructure and were therefore seen as part of the "natural" processes of life (Belasco 1989; Pollan 2006).

However, as of 1990 "organic" is an officially recognised label used by the USDA to denote specific standards in farming methods and food content, and has therefore become a part of the industrial infrastructure that the original use of the term denounced. Furthermore, most producers of 'organic' foods in the U.S. are

large corporations, sometimes multi-national, that distribute their products through large corporations, rather than small local or cooperatively owned health/whole food shops. In other words, 'organic' has become part of the conventional food choices for many Americans and is no longer strictly a countercultural ideology of food production, consumption and distribution. In fact, it has been argued that "organic" is no longer a symbol of alternative lifestyles or worldviews in the U.S. and one must now use the label "beyond organic" to signify a lifestyle - as opposed to food - choice (Pollan 2001).

As stated above, vegetarian and dairy-free diets also have a link to the countercultural movements of the 1960s and 70s, generally due to ethical concerns around the treatment of animals or for the purposes of experimentation with multi-ethnic cuisine (Belasco 1989). Nonetheless, recent trends in official nutrition advice in the U.S., which began with the publication in 1977 of the first dietary goals for Americans developed by the U.S. Senate Select Committee for Nutrition and Human Needs, have moved towards a reduction in meat intake and an increase in vegetable consumption. By 1992, a fourth edition of *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* - an official publication created jointly by the UDSA and the department of Health and Human Services - was released and included a vegetarian version of the food pyramid (Spark 2007). As Pollan points out in his 2006 publication, vegetarianism is now more popular than ever and he suggests there are various reasons for this, including moral dilemmas associated with industrial farming techniques, alienation from the actual process of animal slaughter and nutritional concerns (118, 305).

Therefore, just as purchasing 'organic' foodstuffs has become a conventional practice for many Americans and the label "organic" no longer carries the power to symbolise membership of the counterculture, vegetarianism has become just another option for the health or ethically conscious individual. This might go some way towards explaining the recent move among Cedar River residents towards offering non-vegetarian dishes to their conference guests and focussing more heavily on locally produced foodstuffs, which still fall safely in the realm of practices which symbolise adherence to an alternative lifestyle (Vittersø et. al. 2005).

Individual Beliefs, Values and Morals

While food-related practices can be used to denote group membership, on a different, perhaps more basic level, food is experienced uniquely by each individual. The meanings we, as humans, attach to our food are constantly being developed and renewed in the course of our daily interactions in the world as we come to make sense of our environments with our minds and through our bodies. The very act of classifying something as "food" involves an elaborate series of processes whereby our cultural inheritance, historical knowledge and social practices help us to decide what is and is not edible (Lupton 1996). As I have just discussed above, Cedar River, as a community, supported certain types of food and food-related practices – such as 'organic' or vegetarian – over other types.

Nevertheless, on an individual level, food priorities and preferences proved more complex and were often highly contested among residents. On almost a daily basis, I overheard at least one community resident discussing the benefit of some foodstuff or professing his/her dislike of certain other foodstuffs based on any one of a variety of political, moral, or nutritional reasons. Some residents refused to eat anything that was not raw, while others condemned the use of refined sugars for any purpose. These two preferences were fairly easily accommodated by the rest of the community. However, there were a fair proportion of residents who considered meat an essential part of their daily dietary intake, and this became the centre of quite a few heated discussions. These residents felt that consuming meat was just as "natural", if not more "natural", than relying on a diet that was strictly vegetarian. And while the meat-eating residents were mostly happy to provide themselves with their own meat, when the topic of providing certain "specialty" items was brought up in the course of a meeting or informal discussion, one or more of the meat-eaters would inevitably add that they would like to see meat added to the communal purchases ahead of other seemingly frivolous items.

As Cedar River was undoubtedly a place that fostered a great deal of intention in everyday practices, it does not seem unusual that a large proportion of the residents would be concerned with the effects that their food-related practices had on themselves and the various elements of their environments. Through exploring two common themes that arose in individual residents' narratives and daily practices

in relation to food – namely relocalisation and freeganism - I intend to illuminate the historical and socio-cultural processes tied to food-related practices for individuals at Cedar River. Additionally, I suggest that freeganism and food relocalisation, and the beliefs and ethics that motivate them, point at new trends in alternative food movements that are becoming increasingly apparent in the U.S. as resource availability and global markets shift.

The Promotion of Local Food

About two-thirds of the way through my fieldwork I attended an event with a few Cedar River residents in the nearby city that was aimed at promoting local food networks. Cedar River had a table set up at the event in the hopes of informing attendees and other table-holders of the work that is done at Cedar River through their educational centre and intentional community, and also to show support for the creation of local food networks. Other table-holders included local gardening projects, local goat and cow farms, and the local permaculture network, to name just a few. Each table-holder was asked to bring a clearly labelled dish of food made with local ingredients to share. After an hour or so of chatting, there was a sit-down dinner and a few talks aimed at enlightening the attendees about the various local food producers and processors, and ways in which they could be further supported. Reference was made to the Slow Food movement as a source of information and inspiration for re-localisation projects and the need for local food networks was generally justified in both economic and biophysical resource usage terms. In other words, both the needs for a stronger, more stable local economy, as well as for more efficient use of biophysical resources, were given as the motivation behind creating solid local food networks.

On the way home, I questioned two of the community residents who had attended the gathering as to how they felt about local foods. I felt as if this was a fairly apt topic for discussion, as I had noticed that local foods seemed to be of interest to many Cedar River residents. Not only had a work-trade deal been recently organised with a local goat dairy in order to get subsidised goat milk and cheese, but I'd also seen some residents banding together to obtain locally produced meat. In this instance, both residents felt very strongly that people should be aware of where their food comes from and, consequently, should make decisions on whether or not a

particular item should be eaten based on how far it had travelled to get to the individual. They also expressed the feeling that Cedar River, as a community, could make better food choices and one of them cited the fact that the coconut that was regularly consumed by residents came all the way from Sri Lanka. These two individuals supported the idea of a "mission based kitchen", explaining that such an arrangement would help individuals to be more accountable for their food choices. One of them even suggested that foods such as butter should be excluded from the community diet so as to leave more money for the often higher-priced local foods. The conversation ended with one of the residents stating - as I had heard her state on many occasions - that ultimately she felt better about herself when she ate according to her beliefs.

Slow Food

The concept of food relocalisation was made famous by the emergence of the Slow Food movement in Italy some twenty years ago. The Slow Food movement is understood as an organised response to the globalisation of food-related practices and both promotes the re/establishment of local food networks and the appreciation of place specific foods and food-related practices (Cohen et. al. 2005). Within the movement, emphasis is placed on the quality of foods, which is understood to derive from local traditions and the means used to produce and distribute foodstuffs (Brunori 2007). The Slow Food movement has grown significantly since its inception and now has about 85,000 members involved in nearly 1,000 convivia[17] worldwide (http://www.slowfood.com).

While the Slow Food movement is undeniably a source of inspiration for those looking to establish local food networks, it should be noted that Slow Food convivia are not only focussed on local foods, but they also work to promote what Brunori (2007) calls "locality" foods, which carry a different set of food-related practices and relationships. Local foods are foods that are produced and consumed within a defined 'local' area, whereas locality foods are foods that are produced according to a certain local style or method, but consumed on a global scale. Local foods defined in this way, therefore, are more directly related to the concept of geographical food relocalisation than the Slow Food movement as a whole because

[17] A recognised Slow Food chapter is known as convivium, the plural form being convivia.

they specifically presuppose the establishment of local production and consumption networks (ibid; Roos et. al 2007). Locality foods, on the other hand, can still circulate in a global market and are therefore merely symbolic of food relocalisation (Brunori 2007).

In conjunction with the recent rise in awareness of local food movements, a variety of potent social and ecological meanings have been attached to the notion of 'local food' for those who have come to support geographical food relocalisation. The two most prominent motivations given for a belief in food relocalisation from within the movement are ecological or political economic in kind (http://locavores.com/). This held true in my experience with informants at Cedar River. As I mentioned above in my conversation with two community residents, if foodstuffs had travelled a significant distance in order to arrive in the Cedar River food stores, my informant felt as if those 'food miles' should be made evident to the rest of the community so individuals could make an informed choice over whether or not they were willing to support the ecological costs of mechanised transport. Other individuals at Cedar River made the case for the conservation of 'native species' and biodiversity when choosing to eat locally and felt as if agricultural standardisation was threatening the viability of local food crops through market and ecosystemic competition. In fact, during the time of my fieldwork, an entire weekend was dedicated to debating the pros and cons of introducing 'exotics' into local foodsheds.

As for the political economic motivation, some individuals at Cedar River felt as if the recent rise in global commodity prices, as well as the growing alarm over food scarcity in an ever-increasing number of countries, pointed at a need for stronger local economies that were less vulnerable to changing global markets. Constituting the 'local' in a food economy provided one way in which Cedar River could empower itself politically, as it requires a concerted mobilisation on the part of multiple actors in a given area in order to do so, thereby solidifying shared interests and values (Sonnino 2007). Additionally, by setting up a local economy, certain individuals at Cedar River were able to operate outside of the conventional economy by organising work-trade exchanges and product barters. These practices, taken as a whole then, can be understood as establishing a lifestyle for those who choose to

subscribe to the ideology of food relocalisation. In fact, the term 'locavore', used to denote an individual who consumes foods exclusively from his/her own foodshed, was the 2007 Oxford English Dictionary word of the year.

Why Not Eat For Free

Bread and bread products scarcely ever appeared at Cedar River during the first few months of my fieldwork. Before enquiring why this was the case, I just assumed that bread was not a priority food item for the residents and therefore was not purchased, except for serving to conference guests. I did, however, notice that on the few occasions when bread was baked fresh by some inspired individual or leftover conference bread was made available, it was consumed rapidly and was well appreciated. I started to ask questions about the lack of bread and was told that bread for the community could be picked up from a bakery in town that deposited their day old bread in a bin outside their shop for free collection by any interested individuals. Sometimes the community member who was in charge of doing the food run would collect any available bread, I was told, but residents were encouraged to stop by on their own if they were in town and check for what was available.

By the fifth month of my fieldwork, I noticed bread was being collected regularly from this bin in town and most residents appeared satisfied by the provision of bread. Suddenly, a few months later, bagels started to appear by the dozens alongside the free bread in the community freezers. After some minor investigation, I discovered that one of the new residents, Jeremy, who happened to work in town on a daily basis, had discovered that the local bagel shop threw out their unpurchased bagels at the end of each day in the dumpster behind their shop, and since they were still wrapped he figured it was better to bring them back to Cedar River where they would get eaten rather than let them go to waste. Over night, bagels became a regular fixture at breakfast time for certain individuals. Community residents were mostly aware of where the bread and bagels came from and, to my knowledge, everyone partaking in their consumption was more than happy to eat the recovered food items. It was seen as a bit of a treat.

Fruit was also a somewhat scarce item during certain times of the year at Cedar River. During summer, when local fruits were abundant and less expensive, a variety of fruit made it on to the table at almost every meal. However, in the colder

months, apples were the mainstay of the communal fruit store, with occasional bananas and oranges being thrown in as supplements when they were leftover from conference meals. Individuals who had lived at Cedar River for a full year were well aware of this seasonal fluctuation and some chose to make a concerted effort to store and preserve as much fruit as possible during the abundant times for future use. During the two consecutive autumns that I spent at Cedar River, I witnessed groups of individuals banding together to collect berries from wild bushes all over the property or in nearby parks. One man in particular made regular trips to nearby farms that had finished their harvest and collected any tomatoes, berries, or melons that were left in the fields. Other individuals made special trips to town to pick figs or cherries from the trees that lined certain streets. Every bit of this fruit could be had for no money at all and was used, either immediately or saved for later through freezing and canning, to increase the quality of life for individuals at Cedar River. Some individuals even told me that they felt happier consuming this 'free' fruit than they did consuming fruit that they had purchased, because it helped them to feel more connected to the natural world which had provided it for them.

Freeganism

Although I never once heard the term 'freegan' used at Cedar River in relation to the activities of recovering unwanted food from bins and fields or making use of fruits grown on public property, some individuals were self-professed 'dumpster-divers'. Nonetheless, according to the definition of freeganism from self-professed freegans, such as Adam Weissman, there were more than a few living at Cedar River. Whereas the label 'dumpster-diver' is fairly self-explanatory – a person who enters dumpsters or garbage piles to recover goods that might be re/used – 'freegan' requires some further explanation. Freeganism is a term - most likely coined sometime in the last decade - used to denote a lifestyle committed to finding and actualising alternatives to wasteful, mass-consumptive societal behaviours (Matthews 2006; Pietrzyk 2006). Because freeganism is understood as a lifestyle choice, it differs from dumpster-diving, which is more of an activity that promotes the reduction of resource wastage. Freeganism is often associated with the recovery or use of unwanted food items, but freegans more generally aim to reduce the total global amount of resource wastage through recovery of any and all items (Matthews

2006; Kurutz 2007). To this end, freegans make use of abandoned buildings to use for housing or materials, empty plots of land to grow food or create wildlife sanctuaries, and any wild growing resource that can be foraged. Historic links have been drawn between freegans and the Diggers of the 1960s San Francisco scene and it is thought that the activities of the anti-globalisation organisation, Food Not Bombs, inspired many would-be freegans into action (Pietrzyk 2006; Kurutz 2007).

The Politics and Ethics of Food–Related Practices

Undoubtedly there are politics inherent in choices related to food. Pretty (2004) put it poignantly when beginning his article entitled "We Are What We Eat", with "eating is the most political thing we do on a daily basis[18]" (p.44). Choosing both vegetarian and 'organic' foodstuffs, as I mentioned above, has certain connotations in terms of political and ethical discourse; however, the move towards local or freegan food-related practices can be understood as particularly politically and ethically motivated because such practices tend to be illustrative of a lifestyle transformation (I discuss this in greater detail in a later section of this chapter). Due to the fact that the individuals I described above are primarily concerned with the consumption – the obtainment as well as the ingestion - of foodstuffs in a local or freegan manner, I am framing my analysis in terms of ethical, political and green consumption. Ethical consumption, sometimes referred to as ethical consumerism, is generally understood to denote acts of consumption that take environmental and social concerns into account (Shaw and Clarke 1999; Shaw and Shiu 2002; Barnett et. al. 2005). The most familiar form of ethical consumption is characterised by Fair Trade. Ethical consumption encompasses the notion of green consumption, which, taken on its own, is primarily concerned with ecological standards.

Political consumption, on the other hand, while also used to denote consumer behaviour that is motivated by environmental and social concerns, assumes that such behaviour is inherently political (Svendsen 1995; Micheletti 2003). I use theory developed in relation to all three concepts, but primarily make use of the label

[18] It should be noted that, while eating is inherently political, it is political in a different way for middle-class North Americans than it is for folks in impoverished nations, or impoverished areas of wealthy nations. For middle-class North Americans, the politics inheres in the choices made in relation to different foodstuffs; but for the folks in poverty stricken nations, or areas of otherwise wealthy nations, the politics inheres in the multiple structures that make it possible for folks to starve to death because they simply can not access enough food.

'ethical consumer', as I feel that it most accurately refers to the individuals that are the focus of my analysis; and furthermore, I would argue that ethical consumption implies politics in most cases. I borrow Warde's (2005) definition of consumption, which understands it to be "a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has some degree of discretion" (p.137).

Much has already been written on the topics of ethical, political and green consumerism and consumption in Euro-American countries (See Durning 1992; Shaw and Clarke 1999; Zwart 2000; Shaw and Shiu 2002**;** Micheletti 2003; Cohen et. al. 2005; Barnett et. al. 2005; Varul 2006; Wagner-Tsukamoto and Tadajewski 2006; Carrier 2007) and I assume that this is a result of the fact that ethical consumption is a rising trend in Euro-American countries. Barnett et. al. (2005) propose that the recent proliferation of ethical consumptive behaviours is suggestive of certain beliefs concerning the interaction between collective action, individual behaviour and social progress. This is supported by the claim that local-level political organisation has been the main force for change in the U.S. over the course of history (Cohen et. al. 2005:59).

In the case of Cedar River, because the obtainment and ingestion of food is an everyday practice for individuals, and certain individuals are making conscious decisions to eat locally, form local food networks, or eat according to freegan methods, these individuals are asserting a form of political agency in the belief that their actions can lead to change in the form of social progress. In other words, the residents at Cedar River that chose to support local and freegan food, and the practices associated with its consumption, were participating in ethical and political acts through their individual subject positions as (middle-class, North American) consumers (Barnett et. al. 2005).

The most obvious way in which the freegan and local food enthusiasts were acting out their ethical and political beliefs was by obtaining goods through avenues other than the conventional capitalist market. The very act of rejecting or finding alternatives to the convention suggests dissatisfaction with existing structures which value foodstuffs according to monetary devices. Upon closer examination, to choose

local or freegan foods is also to take an ethical stance on the current state of agricultural policy. Local food networks often promote Community Supported Agriculture schemes and regional farmer's markets in order to free farmers from the constraints imposed on them by participation in the global market (Roos et. al. 2007), while freegan food-related practices can easily be understood as a critique of the monocropping and farm subsidies that result in so much wastage.

Furthermore, choosing local or freegan foods is also indicative of an ethical and political position on environmental concerns, such as damage to or depletion of biophysical resources that result from conventional production and consumption practices. Likewise, individuals who participate in local or freegan food-related practices are making an ethical statement about the place of community in the everyday life of individuals by placing a focus on the redistribution and sharing of goods within a locally defined context (Brunori 2007; Roos 2007).

The Creation of Moral /Ethical Selves via Food-Related Practices

However, we must ask what motivates such political and ethical action by particular individuals. There are certainly a multitude of beliefs inherent in the practices associated with local and freegan food consumption and they presumably have an origin in the past experiences of each individual. It has been suggested by researchers of ethical consumer behaviour that individuals develop "established" concerns, such as health, over the course of their life and are then led into an awareness of other related concerns and issues by virtue of taking part in the practices which involve ethical consumption (Shaw and Clarke 1999). This is supported by the view that consumption is driven by practices (Warde 2005).

A clear example is illustrated by Jeremy, the individual that I mentioned above who was providing bagels to the community from the dumpster behind a shop in town. He initially came to Cedar River with an established concern over the wasteful use of resources he had observed in mainstream American society. He felt his move to Cedar River would help him to live in a more ethical manner and soon began dumpster-diving in the nearby city with a belief that unwanted foodstuffs could be recovered from the local healthfood shop in order to feed the chickens on Cedar River land. By feeding the chickens a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables, Jeremy believed he would both increase the quality of their eggs and negate the need

to purchase food for the chickens, while also reusing 'waste'. As a result of the practice Jeremy developed in relation to his beliefs about wasted resources, he discovered the aforementioned bagels and they, in turn, became a mainstay of community breakfasts for certain other individuals. In all probability, the bagels acted as a conscious-raising tool for at least some of the individuals who consumed them and the original dumpster-diving individual, Jeremy, expanded his practice to include recovering foodstuffs for human consumption.

Of course, this example does not address where the original concern or belief about waste came from for this individual, but it does illustrate how an established belief leads to a practice that, in turn, creates additional concerns and forms of consumption. Presumably, one could spend a very long time trying to get to the origin of such concerns, yet still fail to find an accurate explanation because each individual accumulates experiences throughout the entirety of his/her life that feed into his/her choice of daily practices and the way in which he/she operates within those practices (Warde 2005). Therefore, what I am attempting to illuminate by asking what motivates such ethical and political action by certain individuals is the perceived benefit to said individuals for choosing the practices and types of consumption they do.

Zwart (2000) suggests that the practices associated with ethical consumption allow individuals to cultivate a moral self by virtue of the fact that such individuals are making decisions in their daily consumptive behaviours that require consideration of political and ethical issues. For instance, he argues that the recent trend in detailed food labelling is a result of the demand by certain individuals to feel informed and reassured of the moral identity of the products they are consuming in the face of widespread ambiguity in regard to the use of biotechnology and other technological or economic arrangements that change the way food is produced (p.124). Zwart embeds his argument in a history of food ethics in order to show how the current focus on issues relating to food production and the association between foodstuffs and societal issues is actually a modern development arising in the nineteenth century as a result of both a growing awareness of the implications of population growth on food supplies and the industrial alienation of individuals from the origin of their food. The increased distance between the multiple sites of

production and consumption also fuels Barnett et. al's (2005) argument that practices involved with ethical consumption require individuals to exhibit self-control and moral consciousness, resulting in ethical self-formation (p.30).

In other words, "governing the consuming self" is an intentional act on the part of an individual in order to practise responsibility towards unknown others and demonstrate an ability to think ethically (Zwart 2000:31–32; Micheletti 2003). Accordingly, if an individual identifies with certain beliefs which would be considered moral or ethical – for instance, that contemporary U.S. society is wasteful of resources that should be conserved for future generations - then that individual is likely to behave in a way that reflects those embodied beliefs (Shaw and Shiu 2002). Furthermore, such behaviour is known to bring pleasure to the individuals who choose such practices (Kneafsey et. al. 2007), presumably because the experience has become a rewarding one by virtue of being aligned with one's self-imposed rules.

Finally, Varul (2006) points out that in order for moralisation to occur through practice, certain socio-cultural meanings must already be established around said practice. In other words, moralisation occurs when individuals are making a subjective decision to choose one item over another within a given context of established meaning.

However, I have still yet to address who, exactly, the individuals participating in these acts of ethical consumerism are. Not everyone at Cedar River dumpster dove or made an effort to preserve seasonal local foods or ate only food stuffs that were produced 'locally'. And yet, going through the list of people normally resident at Cedar River during the length of my fieldwork, I notice no sociological patterns regarding those who regularly partook in activities related to local or freegan food, in comparison to those who did not. For instance, Jeremy from the bagel example above was in his late thirties or early forties, was married with no children, and seemingly (according to his occupation) was university educated; yet, Kate, who also regularly dumpster dove with her partner, Jim, was in her late twenties (Jim was in his early forties), parented two children, and was a university student (Jim was a graduate). However, Eldin, who was known to dumpster dive regularly for coffee grounds, was in his early forties, was married with two children, and was university

educated, though Lou, who was in his mid-fifties, had no partner or children, and was university educated, also dumpster dove.

Meanwhile, Paul and his wife Eve, both of whom were in their late thirties/early forties, regularly foraged for wild and untended food with their young child, and Marta and Renee, both in their early to mid- twenties, often joined them. Additionally, Carole, who was in her early thirties, spent endless hours milking goats and making yogurt and cheese from their milk on a small scale, while Betty and Angela, both in their mid-thirties, one parenting two children, the other having none, respectively made a point of collecting large amounts of berries each year for preservation.

I could continue to list a set of residents who were not particularly known for partaking in freegan or local food-related activities, but it would look much the same as the one I have just created. Thus, I am left to conclude that there is no particular correlation between age, gender, marital status or education level (I have excluded socio-economic details as the vast majority of Cedar River residents come from middle-class backgrounds) and a propensity towards participating in ethical consumption – particularly if we consider that the consumption of 'organic' and vegetarian foodstuffs can also be considered a form of ethical consumption (Carrier 2007), though less radical than freeganism or local food-related practices.

Rather, I would like to argue that the very fact of choosing to live in intentional community suggests a desire to behave in a way that reflects one's embodied morals. Some people are better at this than others, some are seemingly more extreme, but not for any sociological reasons that I could discern. Furthermore, the experience of living in intentional community amongst those who share common morals makes individuals more likely to develop practices that are more aligned with said morals and, following Shaw and Clarke's (1999) argument regarding the development of ethical concerns (see above), develop further ethical/moral concerns which then must be addressed through additional practices. Thus, as I argue in the final section of this chapter, the presence of freeganism and local food-related practices at Cedar River is ultimately indicative of a desire among residents to push society towards an even greater awareness of certain moral/ethical concerns that revolve around the obtainment, production and consumption of foodstuffs in the U.S.

and elsewhere; and, as such, these practices work towards generating the experience of a more meaningful life for those residents who place value on moral/ethical engagement with foodstuffs.

Being Radical

I mentioned above that one *could* argue that the consumption of 'organic' and vegetarian foodstuffs is also a form of ethical consumption (Carrier 2007), and thus has the same effect as freeganism or local food-related practices in cultivating an ethical or moral self for an individual. I, too, would argue that 'organic' and vegetarian food consumption are indeed forms of ethical consumption in so far as the ideologies behind consuming such products are often linked to concerns over animal cruelty, ecological degradation and workers' rights. Nevertheless, due to the conventionalisation of 'organic' and vegetarian foodstuffs, I would suggest that the power of these ideologies has diminished for the individuals who count themselves among alternative food enthusiasts because these individuals have made themselves aware of the effects such market conventionalisation has on all the processes associated with the production and consumption of foodstuffs.

Vegetarian and 'organic' food-related practices once had radical concepts such as the reorganisation of food production and consumption structures attached to them at the inception of their use among members of the counterculture in the 1960s. However, they have since lost such meaning and instead carry a vague association to alternative lifestyles for those who stand on the periphery of such practices. In other words, the consumption of both freegan and local foodstuffs differs significantly from the consumption of vegetarian and 'organic' foodstuffs due to the politically radical nature of the practices associated with the former types of consumption. Freegan and, to some degree, local food enthusiasts in the U.S. (and elsewhere) seek to operate outside of the conventional consumer economy driven by market capitalism in order to highlight the value of foodstuffs through the use of symbols – interpersonal relationships, ecological integrity, intrinsic quality - other than money.

They also critique the system of food legality by taking food that is considered waste or obtaining products that have not passed the official protocols, such as homogenisation. This does not mean that they are not consuming, as consumption is occurring at multiple moments in freeganism and local food-related

practices (Warde 2005). Nonetheless, the consumption of local and freegan foods articulates more directly as an individual lifestyle decision made in response to certain ethical and moral beliefs. This is due to the fact that the self that is experienced through such consumption is a result of continuous conscious cultivation by way of daily practices that present themselves as actual alternatives to the whole system of conventions that give cause for ethical and moral concerns in the first place.

Hence, I argue that freeganism and localism were visible, and to some degree prevalent, at Cedar River due to the fact that they - being radical in comparison to the consumption of vegetarian or 'organic' foodstuffs - provided a better avenue through which individual residents could realise their beliefs, values and morals regarding food-related practices. In other words, it was not that Cedar River residents sought to be in opposition to whatever happens in the mainstream (i.e. because vegetarian and 'organic' foodstuffs have become part of the mainstream/conventional market, Cedar River residents felt they must create a new alternative); rather, I am arguing that Cedar River residents were attempting to push society towards an even greater awareness of certain moral/ethical concerns related to the obtainment, production and consumption of foodstuffs in the U.S. and elsewhere. As one resident, Rupert, explained to me, "[Cedar River] is a spin off of American culture. We react to what the larger culture does and does not do" (Interview Aug. 7, 2007). Therefore, if 'organics' and vegetarianism have become conventional, but the morally/ethically dubious processes that vegetarianism and - to a larger degree - 'organics' sought to address persist, then many Cedar River residents felt the need to find new ways to engage with foodstuffs in order to continue to experience themselves as meaningfully engaged with food-related practices.

Conclusion

Through exploring the diverse meanings, beliefs and ethics attached to food and food-related practices at Cedar River, I argue that food is both an avenue through which group identity is asserted - insofar as the community members were attempting to set themselves apart from conventional American food-related practices - and a material way of embodying individual ethics, morals and beliefs in regard to a whole host of political, economic, and historical situations. While

vegetarian and ‘organic’ foods symbolise alternative lifestyles in the popular imagination and therefore provide easily identifiable markers for those interested in such a lifestyle, they are rapidly becoming conventional food options for a large proportion of Americans. Subsequently, new alternative food-related practices are arising - such as local and freegan - which allow individuals to continue to respond daily in a meaningful way to the current environmental and social issues which trouble humanity.

Chapter Six

The Pursuit of Sustainability

The beliefs, values and morals held by an individual or community work to shape the various goals of that individual or community. As I have been arguing throughout this thesis, achievement of such goals becomes the motivating force behind much of the daily activity one witnesses and takes part in, in the context of intentional community. This is not because daily tasks are necessarily infused with beliefs and values, but rather because intentional communities develop cultural models of their own, and these models "include scripts for action in settings" (Weisner 2008: 231) which, when activated, shape thought and action. In other words, in intentional communities, there is an explicitness of value attached to everyday activity. Therefore, the achievement of goals becomes meaningful for both individual residents and the community-as-a-whole, as goal achievement symbolises the realisation of said values, beliefs and morals.

Goal achievement is not only related to short-term satisfaction, but is also related to an individual's - or in some cases, a community's - larger vision for life. Furthermore, the achievement of certain goals extends beyond the individual and the community. The pursuit of sustainability is one way in which an individual - or a community - might link their daily activities with a longer term goal or project which extends beyond the self, as sustainability is inherently future and other-oriented. I therefore use this chapter to analyse the concept of sustainability, as it relates to the lives of Cedar River residents, beginning with the assumption that it is, and can only be, an ongoing pursuit that has no definite end-point. I use the term 'project' to describe sustainability (and, in the following chapter, well-being) in order to reiterate that these concepts evoke processes that engage all aspects of life and are continually worked towards (see Levy 2005).

Throughout the chapter, I focus attention on how Cedar River residents were themselves making use of the concept of sustainability. Rhetorical use of the concept, as well as activities interpreted as sustainability-in-action, provide the main ethnographic details. Both the biophysical and social dimensions of sustainability

are explored in keeping with the understanding of sustainability as a project. In particular, a detailed discussion of practices thought to promote social sustainability is included in an effort to locate possible sites of socially sustainable behaviour, as empirical data is somewhat lacking in regard to this dimension of sustainability. Ultimately, by comparing the reality of Cedar River, an intentional community focussed on pursuing biophysical and social sustainability, to sustainable development objectives, which aim towards societal progress, justice, durability and stability, this chapter argues that intentional communities, such as Cedar River, should indeed be understood as viable contexts for the experience of "superlatively" meaningful lives, as they are particularly conducive for pursuing long-term projects such as sustainability.

A Continually Contested Concept

'Sustainability' is a word that is now used so frequently, by all manner of person, that it requires a continued effort at definition. After much examination from respected individuals in a variety of disciplines, the concept of sustainability remains a slippery one, applied haphazardly to a multitude of other concepts and generally taken for granted as something positive in and of itself (See Becker, Jahn and Stiess ed. 1999; Redcliff ed. 2005 v. 1–4 for details of its use in the social sciences, in particular). In its most popular sense, sustainability is understood via its connection to the report published as a result of the1987 World Commission on Environment and Development regarding 'sustainable development'. Famously, the Brundtland commission defines 'sustainable development' as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987: 43 cited in Kenny and Meadowcroft 1999: 13). This quote appears in practically every text that aims to explore some facet of the concept of sustainability, whether it be referring to 'sustainable development', 'environmental sustainability', 'sustainable growth', 'social sustainability', or any of the other innumerable mutations of the term. More specifically, "[s]ustainability/non-sustainability is a qualification of states and processes within a continuum of possible states and processes…Sustainability, therefore, is not a specific feature of the environment or of society, but refers to *the*

viability of their relationship over long periods of time" (Becker and Jahn 1999: 6 emphasis mine).

Universally inherent in the use of the word 'sustainability' is some degree of concern about the future of both humankind and the environments which support human settlements. In other words, sustainability is a concept that is primarily concerned with societal structures – political, economic, religious, etc. – and their relationship to the biophysical world, both now and into the unknown future (Becker, Jahn and Stiess 1999; Thin 2002). Thus, sustainability calls into question individual and societal beliefs and values regarding both time and altruistic behaviour. From a social scientific perspective, then, a localised analysis of sustainability "addresses the question of how societies can shape their modes of change in such a way as to ensure the preconditions of development for future generations", as well as providing a picture of how a given community envisions desirable social - which includes environmental - conditions (Becker, Jahn and Stiess 1999: 4).

Constituting Sustainability

Sustainability was a central focus for the folks who lived at Cedar River during the time of my research. In a document written by one community member aimed at describing to the public how the community members see themselves, the author explicitly states that they (the community of individuals at Cedar River) are striving to create an "ecologically and socially sustainable culture". I spent much of my time there trying to discern exactly how one goes about creating this culture. How does one know when they are living in an ecologically or socially sustainable manner? Are there certain boxes one can tick in order to prove that sustainability has been achieved? Much of the earliest literature on sustainable development seems to suggest that sustainability is in fact a state that can be achieved; but most theorists would now agree that the idea of sustainability as a goal is a dubious one and sustainability is better understood as a principle which guides decision-making and action (Becker and Jahn and Stiess 1999; Thin 2002).

At Cedar River, sustainability was being consciously pursued on a daily basis through the choices made by the community-as-a-whole and individual residents in regard to everything from food purchases to paint options. Community residents were continually called on to constitute their understandings of sustainability in an

ongoing process of group discussion and decision-making. For instance, finding a sustainable vegetarian source[19] of protein for use in community meals was a recurring topic of discussion in both community-wide meetings and individual conversations. Some felt that beans were relied on too heavily, while others thought that tofu and tempeh, although sourced from organic producers and thus GMO-free, were unsustainable vegetarian protein sources, as new research had shown that soy protein in large quantities is detrimental to one's health. Still others felt concerned about the quantity of quinoa (a protein-rich grain) consumed by the community, as it is unsustainable to rely on a grain that is sourced from South America.

This particular dilemma inevitably came down to making sure multiple options were available at all times so that individuals could pick and choose the food that felt most sustainable for them personally. In this case, diversity was the key to sustainability, as there was no clear consensus as to what practice was less unsustainable than the others. Identifying practices as clearly unsustainable is one generally accepted way of identifying more sustainable practices, as the sustainability of *any* process or practice is fairly uncertain (Becker, Jahn and Stiess 1999: 6). However, to give another example, when it came to choosing paint for repainting one of the classrooms, the (more) sustainable option was more easily defined and agreed upon. The community had to decide whether they wanted to purchase low VOC paint (VOCs are carbon-based chemical compounds that are thought to be toxic to humans and their environments), which costs more than standard paint, even though they were on a tight budget. The group quickly and unanimously agreed that they were indeed happy to spend the extra cash on environmental and personal health, as this was clearly the more sustainable option. Thus, sustainability was constituted in relation to an alternative option identifiable as unsustainable

At this point, I do not aim to judge whether or not I think the above decisions, and others like them, are truly making Cedar River a sustainable place to live. Rather, I aim to understand what it is that the residents of Cedar River had in mind when they were talking about, and actualising, a "sustainable culture". How had

[19] A vegetarian source of protein was a community issue, as residents only bought vegetarian food communally. On their own, or as small groups, meat-eating residents purchased other sources of protein.

they come to formulate their ideas on sustainability? Discovering the underlying beliefs and values that residents, and the community-as-a-whole, were attaching to certain practices labelled as 'sustainable' allows us to understand how the pursuit of sustainability, stated as an organising principle for the Cedar River community, becomes a source of meaning for all involved. The most obvious way to do this is to first come to grips with the practices and activities that Cedar River residents viewed as explicitly unsustainable. After all, if Cedar River residents were attempting to construct an "ecologically and socially sustainable culture" as part of their intentional community experiment, then they must have felt that, at the very least some, aspects of the culture that they had experienced in their daily lives was unsustainable (Becker, Jahn and Stiess 1999:6; Kenny and Meadowcroft 1999:4).

It is fair to say that these unsustainable practices were largely associated with the wider society within which Cedar River exists, namely the United States. Cedar River, being an intentional community, explicitly presents us with a critique of American society through the very act of having removed themselves from what is considered the 'mainstream' society in order to live according to alternative values, beliefs and morals (Brown 2002). These norms, as the quote above tells us, relate to both the biophysical aspects of unsustainability and the social processes associated with unsustainability. As Neil Thin (2002) points out, the biophysical aspects of unsustainability are generally understood and relate to the depletion of resources and uncertainty as regards biophysical flows and processes. However, the social processes that supposedly cause, or add to, unsustainability are not so well defined (p.39).

In constituting ecological sustainability at Cedar River, then, one would expect to find examples of how resource usage and other biophysical processes were being handled in such a way as to address the commonly held criticisms of conventional American methods. As for social sustainability, exploring the ways in which residents were organising their social interaction, particularly in relation to perceived typical American interpersonal relations, would presumably tell us something about individual and community-wide beliefs regarding processes that support social sustainability. Through examining daily activities, as well as rhetorical uses of the concept - and later the beliefs underlying such activities and

verbal symbols - it becomes possible to understand how the practices and processes associated with sustainability at Cedar River worked to confer meaning on the lives of residents.

Demonstrating Sustainability

Ecological/Biophysical Sustainability

The most explicit way that I observed the community demonstrating this "sustainable culture" was through what Cedar River residents called a "sustainability tour". The tour was a do-it-yourself walk through the property that pointed the visitor toward sign-posted features that were seen as examples of ecologically sustainable living. Some of the more obvious stops on the sustainability tour included the solar shower (meaning the water is heated by solar hot water panels and surrounded by willow to collect the runoff) in the meadow, hay boxes (super-insulated boxes used to finish the cooking process on most boiled items, thereby saving the gas used to fuel the stove) in the kitchen, and the low flow toilets (altered to flush 40% less water than the average toilet) in the communal washrooms.

These, along with all other stops on the sustainability tour, were demonstrating an awareness of the environmental impacts of more conventional American methods of washing, cooking and waste management. The signpost at each location explained why the method being used at Cedar River was more sustainable, in terms of resource consumption and overall environmental impact, than the conventional option. The sustainability tour is exactly the sort of thing one would expect to see at an intentional community that uses sustainability as an organising concept and runs courses on permaculture and eco-village design. The exhibitions on the tour are all straight-forward ways of addressing ecological sustainability, as they are primarily concerned with commonly understood biophysical aspects of unsustainability. Yet, I am not sure that this really tells us anything about how residents of Cedar River were *acting* on the concept of sustainability (in the ecological/biophysical sense).

It is within the not-so-explicit, or implicit, demonstrations of ecological/biophysical sustainability – the daily conversations and activities individuals were involved with – that we discover more fruitful information on how this notion of sustainability was actually operating at Cedar River. There are

numerous entries in my field notes that describe conversations or behaviours that I observed over the fourteen months of my fieldwork at Cedar River which I deemed as demonstrations of the ways in which residents were acting on the concept of ecological/biophysical sustainability. One such example was a community resident's announcement that he had completed the construction of a pedal-powered washing machine. The resident, Frank, had explained to me that this was a simple energy-saving device, but it felt like a tangible step towards a more sustainable community. This is a clear example of one individual taking the idea of sustainability and acting on it through the creation of a machine designed to help the community address biophysical unsustainabilities.

Every Cedar River resident that I questioned about Frank's machine agreed that it was, in fact, a positive contribution towards realising their goals as a community and nobody contested the notion that using less electricity, and hence fewer non-renewable resources, to complete their daily activities is an ecologically/biophysically sustainable practice. However, was that belief enough to guarantee that residents would actually use Frank's machine? After all, the machine only continues to be a way for residents to act on the concept of ecological/biophysical sustainability if it is in use, just like the solar shower or the hay boxes in the kitchen. Was simply creating technology that was understood to be more ecologically sustainable than mainstream alternatives a plausible way for residents at Cedar River to work towards sustainability?

Travis, a community resident who came to Cedar River in the capacity of an intern in order to learn about practical ways to address sustainability, made a poignant observation regarding this matter during the interview I had with him. Travis stated that Cedar River is still very much a part of the 'mainstream' society in the ways in which the residents *use* technology and energy. In other words, the people who live at Cedar River are used to the unsustainable, but convenient, technology in the "outside world" and continue to enjoy many of those conveniences while living at Cedar River even though they are aware of the effects and seemingly plausible alternatives. If Travis was referring to conveniences such as the use of air-conditioning and indoor heating, clothes washers and dryers, and personal vehicles on a regular basis, then my observations would force me to agree with him. There

were plenty of instances that I witnessed where community residents were being reminded (by fellow residents) to keep windows shut when heating or cooling devices were in operation, and multiple times I observed residents making use of the clothes dryer on a sunny day or jumping into their vehicle to drive into town instead of using one of the bikes provided by the community. These are all simple adjustments in behaviour generally associated with sustainable resource usage and understood by residents as having a positive effect on biophysical flows and processes. Why were residents failing to make these adjustments to their daily activities if they were supposedly striving to create a sustainable culture?

It appeared that, although certain practices such as taking a solar shower or using hayboxes to cook with were subscribed to by Cedar River residents, the daily activities of residents were not necessarily organised according to a principle of ecological sustainability. Rather, biophysical concerns were addressed in a piecemeal manner according to each resident's level of priority and a certain baseline of demonstrable practices, seen as alternatives to conventional American practices, was put into place by the community-as-a-whole in order to maintain the educational – and therefore, non-profit - goal of promoting ecological sustainability. When it came down to whole group decisions on adjustments that could be made in support of ecological sustainability - for instance introducing a more sophisticated grey water system or growing more food on Cedar River land to reduce the amount of fossil fuels used in transport - there was general support for the idea from residents because everyone understood why these adjustments would make Cedar River more ecologically sustainable. Yet, individual actions in support of ecological sustainability were not as readily taken.

However, from a different point of view, one might argue that the educational potential of the sustainability tour, as well as Frank's washing machine, whether or not they were used by residents, act as an alternative way of pursuing the goal of sustainability. As Zidanšek (2007) points out:

> Education of individuals is a valuable tool, which gives additional choices to the individuals…If one can assure that sustainability aspects and values are integrated into education, sustainability has a chance. Examples like eco-schools are particularly valuable because they impact young children and teach them to implement sustainable thought patterns.
>
> (p.895)

Although it was not uncommon to hear eco-village and permaculture course students enquire as to why many Cedar River residents did not appear to be 'walking the talk' of ecological sustainability on a daily basis, thereby questioning the actual beliefs, values and morals held by these residents, I am suggesting that the very act of participating in the education of others regarding sustainability is perhaps fulfilling enough on its own to allow for certain residents to experience an enhanced quality of life at Cedar River. This suggestion is supported by statements, such as the following, which was given in response to the question, "Do you believe that [Cedar River] is 'walking the talk', in terms of the mission statement":

> I think that the programmes that we offer (lists some of the programmes by name) … Those seem to be really mission-based and educational outreach and… It's not just educational but it's…we're always improving on ourselves. I'd like to be bolder in terms of our electrical consumption – finding alternatives to that and changing the way we do that. I've often wanted us to really get behind a transportation car-share or ride-share situation that has a goal of using the least amount of fuel possible. You know, it's like let's even change our schedules in town so that these trips can happen together and stuff like that. But, that's daunting to me. I don't want to take it on.
>
> (Jim, Interview Sept. 14, 2007)

However, for other residents, education and outreach on the subject of ecological sustainability was simply not enough. These residents shared the sentiment that Cedar River was only "superficially in line" with their mission statement (Arthur, Interview Sept. 5, 2007) and some stated outright that Cedar River was absolutely not 'walking the talk' in terms of sustainability.

Thus, I am brought to the conclusion that there was no such thing as an *average* view of what enacting ecological sustainability constituted at Cedar River. Rather, there were multiple and contested ways for residents to demonstrate sustainability according to their personal beliefs, values and morals. Seemingly, some residents were dissatisfied with the baseline of engagement with sustainability goals at Cedar River and I witnessed more than one resident make the decision to leave, having decided that they could no longer experience their lives as meaningfully engaged with respect to the pursuit of ecological sustainability.

Social Sustainability

There are also demonstrations associated with the pursuit of social sustainability to consider. The processes and practices associated with social sustainability, as I mentioned above, are less well-defined than those related to ecological/biophysical sustainability. Nonetheless, residents of Cedar River referred to sustainability when discussing or taking part in a wide range of interactions that can only be described as social. For example, one day over lunch about a year into my fieldwork, I overheard two community residents, Eldin and Mary, talking about a predicted U.S. stock market crash (which subsequently came to fruition as part of what is now known as the 'Global Credit Crunch'). That led a few of us into a conversation in which Mary said that she truly felt that the Community Land Trust[20] that Cedar River was hoping to set up was the only viable and sustainable way she could see of building and owning a house in the United States. In other words, Mary felt that her work towards setting up the Community Land Trust at Cedar River was a way in which she was actively pursuing social sustainability.

Not surprisingly, when the Community Land Trust was discussed in meetings, most individuals were enthusiastic about the potential it held for making Cedar River a more socially sustainable community. In particular, longer-term residents were excited by the possibility that more stable housing would lead to a longer duration in individual residential stays, as many residents did not stay longer than approximately two or three years. However, when it was suggested that residents write to, or visit, their local political representatives in order to lobby for assistance with aspects of the Community Land Trust, the response was minimal. Again, most residents could theoretically see the benefit of addressing political and economic structures in order to make them more sustainable, but were not necessarily keen to organise their activities around doing so, suggesting either a lack of motivation or desire, or the possibility that these residents were already receiving ample fulfilment from other sustainability-related activities. As with education

[20] Community Land Trusts are fairly common in the U.K. and are becoming more so in the U.S. They are non-profit arrangements that set aside an owned bit of land in trust for perpetuity. Houses may be built or renovated on the land by private individuals, but the land itself is held separate and cannot be owned by anyone other than the trust itself. In other words, the land that the house is built on is actually being leased by the owner of the house, not bought, which serves to keep houses affordable as they are not affected by the constant market fluctuations in land prices.

related to ecological sustainability versus everyday practices, "[s]ustainability…must always be understood as a project somewhere in a cultural learning environment, in some particular community with its constellation of goals and local constraints and opportunities (Weisner 2008: 229).

An additional example comes from a conversation that I had with a community resident, Alex, about the psychology of suffering and happiness. Alex told me that he felt too many people at Cedar River (and "other New Age-type" groupings) were looking for contentment from each other and not from themselves. I asked Alex if he thought the reminders that we received every week at the work party from Burke about "being in your joy" helped people to focus on what they appreciate and what makes them happy. He replied that he felt Cedar River, as a whole, was doing better than the "mainstream society" in terms of not always focusing on what made them miserable or what they didn't have; but he did not feel that Cedar River was creating a culture that encourages people to find happiness within themselves. Alex felt that the community still focused on finding happiness from others or from the idea of community. This, in Alex's opinion, was not sustainable. We can see, then, that for Alex, socially sustainable behaviour was something one demonstrated through their subjective sense of well-being, or happiness, and he did not feel like Cedar River residents were modelling social sustainability because they were not promoting the attainment of happiness from within. Alex did, however, admit that the Cedar River community was more socially sustainable than "mainstream" American society, which would suggest that Burke's reminders, and similar practices, were in fact demonstrations of socially sustainable behaviour.

These demonstrations of ecological/biophysical and social sustainability provide a good window into the diversity of ways in which Cedar River residents were working with the concept of sustainability. On the surface, they are similar to each other in that they all provide a critique of some aspect of American society, as it is known and understood by the informant. For instance, in the last example, Alex is criticising the attitude of negativity that he observes among individuals in his daily interactions in "mainstream society", while in the example that comes before, Mary

appears to be criticising the political and economic institutions that structure American society.

Yet, they differ greatly in terms of the scope to which the notion of sustainability is being applied. To put it another way, each demonstration of sustainability described above understands sustainability to apply to different realms of experience, from individual behaviour through to national policy. Perhaps that goes some way towards explaining why enactment of these various conceptions of sustainability was not uniform throughout the community, but individualised according to value priority. It appears that there are trade-offs for individuals between different conceptions of sustainability when attempting to organise one's activities around such an ambiguous principle. After all, using a community-wide organising principle as broad as ecological and social sustainability is bound to result in competition over long-term versus short-term goals, present versus future generations, and biophysical versus social objectives (Thin 2002: 99). Therefore, it seems appropriate to further unpack these examples, one-by-one, in an attempt to better understand how the activities and ways of being that residents thought of, and described, in relation to the concept of sustainability worked to create meaning in the lives of said residents. To put it a different way, the next sections aims to uncover how specific activities and ways of being were symbolically linked to various aspects of the social world, particularly in relation to residents' pursuits of sustainability.

What Underlies Conceptions of Sustainability

In the example of the pedal-powered washing machine discussed earlier, Frank and Travis were demonstrating concern for the immediate sphere of community-wide technology and resource usage. Frank had ostensibly created his version of a pedal-powered washing machine in order to remove the need for electricity for doing one's laundry, which happens to be aligned with Travis's desire to see the community's inhabitants shift their habits as regards non-renewable resource consumption associated with technology. On the surface, this appears to be a straight-forward, widely understood view of sustainability in that it addresses specifically biophysical elements of unsustainability. However, there are two further ideas inherent in this move towards a more sustainable community that are worth pointing out, as they provide an avenue through which we might come to understand why the pedal-

powered washing machine, as a symbol, was meaningful for Frank (and perhaps Travis), and by extension Cedar River, in relation to the pursuit of sustainability.

The first has to do with 'appropriate technology'. Appropriate technology[21] is a term used to describe technology that is specifically suited to *all* the needs of the particular individual or community that will be utilising it. This means that the device will not only serve the function of getting the job done, but it will also operate in such a way that the environmental, political, and economic needs of the individual or community are also being served. 'Appropriate technology' does not necessarily denote simple technology (though this is often thought to be the case due to the association made between appropriate technology and Mohandas Gandhi's teachings regarding simple village technology), but it is generally focussed on local resource usage and resource efficiency. Thus, for Frank, and perhaps the community-as-a-whole, a pedal-powered washing machine has the ability to symbolise action taken to address issues of energy efficiency and resource consumption, both of which are aligned with the environmental and economic goals of Cedar River. In other words, the construction and use of a pedal-powered washing machine becomes meaningful for Frank and other Cedar River residents because it provides a symbolic link with specific aspects of social life that are understood as contributing to the sustainability of a given environment.

The second way in which Frank's pedal-powered washing machine links him, and by extension the community-as-a-whole, to a particular area of social life which is understood in relation to the concept of sustainability is via its status as technology which is 'off the grid'. The idea behind the phrase 'off the grid' is simply to become self-sufficient, either individually or on a community scale, to the point where there is no reliance on publicly provided utilities, such as gas, electric or water. Members of the Cedar River community have not officially stated self-sufficiency (often confused with sustainability) as one of their goals as a community, though there were some residents during the time of my fieldwork that would have liked to see that eventuality. In any case, reducing the community's reliance on the grid was certainly an oft-stated goal, as this was seen as more economically viable for the community as well as being more ecologically sustainable for the planet. Consequently, Frank's

[21] E. F. Schumacher is generally thought to be responsible for popularising the notion of 'appropriate technology' in the developed world via his famous book, published in 1973, *Small is Beautiful.*

simple adjustment to the community's technology was actually a way in which he could assist Cedar River in following their principles of both social and ecological sustainability. Moreover, the pedal-powered washing machine possessed the ability to act as a symbolic link between both individual and communal behaviour, and a whole host of non-mainstream values, beliefs and morals, thus linking Cedar River residents to the larger community of folks attempting to pursue sustainability through alternative means.

In the example of Mary and the Community Land Trust, which refers more specifically to the pursuit of social sustainability, Mary is clearly drawing a symbolic link between her actions in setting up a Community Land Trust at Cedar River and the larger picture of political and economic institutions in the United States. In other words, Mary's actions in helping to set up the Community Land Trust gained meaning for her, and perhaps the rest of the community, due to the connection made between Community Land Trusts and lifestyle alternatives to state-imposed institutions. Thus, we can say that Mary's view of sustainability was very much in line with the way in which the concept was used in the Rio Declaration - a formal document including 27 principles on environment and development that came out of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro – due to the clear assertion from both Mary and the Rio Declaration that social, which includes economic, concerns are just as important as environmental concerns in the realm of sustainability, and that state-imposed structures have a great effect on the unsustainability of a given society (http://www.unep.org; Edwards 2005).

Mary explicitly declares that a Community Land Trust provides the only sustainable way of building and owning a house in the United States. In doing so, she is referring to the fact that Community Land Trusts fall somewhat outside the economic model most individuals in the U.S. are familiar with. Buildings that are part of a Community Land Trust are not tied to the housing market in the same way individually owned properties are, nor do their owners conceive of land as an individually owned commodity. Moreover, being part of a Community Land Trust presumes a set of social arrangements that will promote shared resources and communal responsibility, unlike the individualistic lifestyle of the stereotypical American homeowner. Thus, involving oneself in the set-up of a Community Land

Trust symbolises a certain level of dissatisfaction with current economic policies and institutions, which ultimately is interpreted as addressing issues of social sustainability. Additionally, being part of a Community Land Trust can be understood as a demonstration of support for social justice and equity across class divides due to the fact that affordable housing is a major barrier for those on working class - and often even middle class - salaries, partially resulting from a lack of government regulation in the housing market. Therefore, by becoming part of a Community Land Trust, Mary and the rest of Cedar River's residents can symbolically denounce the political institutions that allow for such inequities to continue, thereby pursuing social sustainability.

The example of Alex is rather more philosophical than the other examples, as his statements appear somewhat reminiscent of the world renouncing scripts associated with such major world religions as Hinduism, for example (See Dumont 1960). Alex was concerned with the happiness of individuals and how that related to social sustainability. Alex appears to have believed that most people's values and beliefs – what motivates them to act in the world – needed a positive adjustment so that such people can enjoy an increased quality of life, presumably with less conflict and a greater sense of life satisfaction. Thus, Alex was making a symbolic connection between happiness, and particularly happiness which is derived from within oneself, and societal well-being. In other words, increasing individual happiness, according to this link, works to create a more sustainable society.

This final conception of sustainability is related to the portion of Cedar River's mission which states that the community aims to demonstrate ways in which people can live in socially sustainable relationships with one another. During the time of my fieldwork at Cedar River, the community's main strategy for addressing this aspect of sustainability was to commit themselves to open and honest communication with each other. There were various techniques and forums that helped to promote such communication and trust, such as well-being meetings and 'millings[22]'. The ways in which these activities worked to create particular types of interpersonal relationships

[22] Millings were a frequently occurring activity at Cedar River in which individuals paired up with each other and shared something that was likely to bring the person sharing more in touch with the way they were feeling in the present moment. Millings are described in greater detail in Chapter 2.

is discussed in detail in Chapter 2. The point here is that certain types of sociality are being viewed by Alex and, as we will see, other residents, as more sustainable than others. This prompts us to ask: what, exactly, is socially sustainable behaviour?

Social Sustainability – What Does That Mean?

Thin (2002) rightfully states that, currently, "we have no viable model for a sustainable society" (p.7). What we do have, however, are a wide variety of visions and aspirations about the social changes or social progress we would like to see for our societies. For Cedar River, these visions and aspirations were vaguely summarised in the organisation's mission statement and include principles such as simplicity, non-discrimination, diversity, and integration with the surrounding environment – both on a community level and as a model for the larger U.S. society. Additionally, we have indicators - created, for the most part, by those involved with the development industry - that allow us to assess socially desirable change. The primary goal of such indicators is to provide some tangible unit of measurement as to how sustainable or unsustainable a given society is and to identify areas requiring social change. Yet, as Thin (2002) also points out, few of these indicators are actually representative of society. In order to address social progress, and thus the move towards a more sustainable society, more fully, processes such as those involved with trust, solidarity and equity must be explored.

This suggests that looking for ways in which a given society functions under varying degrees of the aforementioned processes may provide a way to develop indicators of progress that more accurately correspond with society than the ones currently in use, such as GDP, GPI or HDI. However, seeing as my goal is not to develop indicators or judge the relative sustainability of sociality at Cedar River, I find this point useful insofar as it highlights some processes through which it is agreed that social sustainability might be pursued. By examining the processes associated with trust, solidarity and equity – all of which were identified by Thin (2002) as truly social indicators of sustainability - at Cedar River, we might come to understand how said processes gain meaning for residents in relation to everyday activities and behaviours, and thus contribute to the pursuit of sustainability.

Social Capital

One way of thinking about the processes associated with trust, solidarity and equity in a holistic manner is by way of the concept of social capital. Social capital, in its most general sense, refers to the quality of the social networks and relationships which operate on multiple levels of society, particularly as these networks and relationships are informed by shared unofficial values and norms (Fukuyama 2000: 98; Helliwell 2001: 43; Thin 2002: 144). The amount of social capital an individual or community possesses is thought to indicate the likelihood of overall success and well-being (Bourdieu 1972; Putnam 2000). Trust, solidarity, and equity, it can be agreed, are all components of strong social relations and are thought to contribute to social capital. As such, a brief look at social capital, although it is a somewhat contentious concept, provides a useful base for understanding the ties between strong interpersonal relationships, social progress and sustainability.

Francis Fukuyama (2000) explores the emergence of social capital in a given community, or more generally society, as both the product of hierarchical structures and spontaneous – in this case referring to unstructured or unprompted - interactions between individuals on a daily basis (pgs 103 - 111). Hierarchically generated social capital, in Fukuyama's assessment, derives from such arrangements as state law and constitutions, as well as institutionalised religion. These are all top-down structures which create rules that translate into values and norms for a given society or community. Spontaneously generated social capital, on the other hand, derives from bottom-up organisation and negotiation, and presents itself through arrangements such as common law, folk beliefs and tradition, and unregulated markets. Fukuyama takes his explanation of social capital formation further by making a distinction between social capital that is the product of rational choice, such as law, and social capital that results from "a-rational" decisions, such as religion.

Most of the social capital that is associated with modern societies, such as the U.S., is thought to derive from hierarchically generated, rational decisions; or, as is increasingly the case in some countries, hierarchically generated "a-rational" sources (i.e. religion). At Cedar River, these forms of social capital appeared to be understood as socially *unsustainable* due to the fact that the community-wide norms and values were developed in direct opposition to such processes. Instead, at Cedar

River, residents were continuously attempting to generate social capital in a spontaneous manner (which Fukuyama (2000: 107) relates to the *Gemeinschaft* model of society) through the complex interpersonal relationships between community residents, and more than half of the time, such social capital was the product of "a-rational" – in their case emotional – connections. In other words, the values promoted at Cedar River that specifically relate to social interaction - such as trust, open and honest communication, equity, solidarity, and diversity - were understood by residents as sustainable *particularly* because they were developed through spontaneous and ongoing interactions between community residents, rather than resulting from state-imposed structures which, to some extent, have been criticised for the decline of social capital among the members of modern nations by forerunners in the study of social capital, such as James Coleman (1991, for instance).

Furthermore, such interactions were thought to lead to feelings of increased subjective well-being. The following quote from one community member, Roger, sums this notion up:

> And then I'd also been in a larger community where… certainly not everybody was operating according to trying to be, like, really open and honest and communicative and supportive at the same time. And here [at Cedar River] it was a place where people – everybody – to varying degrees did that and was committed to it. And so I had no idea that people could say those kinds of things to each other, you know, and come out feeling happy that they'd talked.
>
> (Interview Sept. 2, 2007)

In his paper on the relationship between social capital, the economy and well-being, John Helliwell (2001) is able to conclude that individuals who report higher levels of social capital, also report higher levels of subjective well-being. Helliwell examined well-being in relation to health, education, economic stability, ability to meet personal aspirations, and genetic predispositions for feelings of well-being, and argued that all are greatly affected by the social capital an individual possesses. All of these variables, except perhaps a genetic predisposition to feelings of well-being, are thought to be independent indicators of social progress. Taken as a whole then, Helliwell is asserting the belief that subjective well-being is inextricably linked to social progress and sustainability, as human quality of life is at the core of both sets

of processes. Therefore some discussion of the ways in which individuals understand their well-being as being related to aspects of interpersonal relationships (trust, solidarity, equity) or social capital in general, is necessary in any discussion of social sustainability. (A more in-depth discussion of well-being continues in Chapter Seven).

Despite the discussion above, it would be foolish to conclude that Cedar River was a prime model for social sustainability simply because the processes associated with interpersonal relationships were thought by residents to result in the experience of well-being. Moreover, understanding the development of social capital in a spontaneous manner as more sustainable than hierarchically generated social capital simply because it sits in opposition to mainstream societal structures which are thought to contribute to a decline in social capital by certain social scientists (Coleman 1991) and Cedar River residents alike, is also naïve. As the following sub-sections will illuminate, the social processes associated with sustainability are complex and contested, and often idiosyncratic. And yet, I am suggesting that the analysis of said processes in the context of Cedar River – a context which was intentionally attempting to align their everyday actions with explicit beliefs, values and morals – is useful because it provides us with insight on how individuals come to understand such processes as meaningful in relation to the pursuit of sustainability.

Trust

As I mentioned above, social capital at Cedar River was often times developed in an "a-rational" manner, usually through some level of emotional interaction. I am describing it as such, in accordance with Fukuyama's (2000) categories, because the qualities of trust and connectedness that I witnessed and felt, and others explained feeling, at Cedar River were not a result of rational choice, but a response to the emotional interaction that occurred on a daily basis. This thinking could be described as distinctly Western, as the dichotomy between rationality and emotion derives from Cartesian dualism (See Milton 2002: 21). Nevertheless, this type of analysis seems in keeping with the worldview of my informants (See Heelas1996:5 for a comparative example from within the New Age). One particular interaction

that I was witness to during the latter half of my fieldwork illuminated for me how trust was conceived of and operating among, at least some portion of, residents.

During a conversation regarding the foreseeable economic benefits that might result from the restructuring of Cedar River's business operations, Alex made a comment, with which Arthur agreed, that can be approximated as: I am more able to operate out of a "heart space" when I know the business of Cedar River is in order. I interpreted this statement to mean that, when Alex was able to have trust in the structures that were supporting him – when he felt like they were sustainable – he was able to get out of his "head" and into his "heart". Operating out of a "heart space", according to the beliefs that circulated at Cedar River, is a more holistic way of being because when one is operating out of a "heart space", one is recognising one's emotions and intuitive notions and incorporating them into one's conscious experience of the world. It is thus understood to be a more desirable way of being in comparison to being always stuck in a rational "head space", devoid of feeling. However, operating out of a "heart space" requires trust of those around you, as it implies a more vulnerable state due to the emotional disclosure inherent of such a space, and trust is only gained through relationships that have shown themselves to be sustainable (resilient and long-lasting).

According to Helliwell (2001), trust in interpersonal relationships does in fact correlate positively with more productive, enjoyable lives. He claims that this is related, in part, with minimising the costs of risk and uncertainty. Fukuyama (2000) takes a similar stance in stating that "[t]rust acts like a lubricant that makes any group or organisation run more efficiently", but can only come about when members of a group find that they can rely on one another (p.98). This suggestion seems to be reflected in Alex's comment about feeling less uncertainty when he is able to trust the network of people supporting him at Cedar River, and vice versa.

Thin (2002) also suggests that trust, being a disposition that has some bearing on solidarity, is a key component of desirable social processes (p.89). Solidarity, in Thin's assessment, is a sign of both resilience and durability in relation to both ecological and social sustainability. Again, this excerpt seems to point to a perceived connection between trust and the resilience and durability of Cedar River as a community. If Alex feels comfortable operating out of a "heart space" – a space that

requires great levels of trust – then he is confident that the community structures supporting him are both resilient and durable and aligned with his own aims and values.

This analysis of Alex's, and by agreement Arthur's, understanding of trust in relation to sustainability is actually somewhat at odds with the aforementioned association between the spontaneous creation of social capital and sustainability. Alex and Arthur seem to be suggesting that trust - understood to be an important component of social capital and a social process that indicates sustainability – at least in some instances is only developed through durable and resilient relationships. This is quite the opposite of spontaneity.

However, this flags up the multi-faceted nature of social sustainability. Alex and Arthur were referring particularly to the economic and political structures at work at Cedar River; whereas the aforementioned spontaneity was most likely referring to cultural structures. In other words, these conflicting notions regarding what constitutes social sustainability only appear to be conflicting because they lack specificity. This is not to say that some folks at Cedar River would not have ideally liked to see trust, and thus social capital, arise out of spontaneous interaction regardless of which particular social realm one was operating within; certainly some folks would have, as was alluded to in Chapter Three. Rather, the point is that sustainability is an extremely broad concept and attaching the word 'social' to it does very little in terms of clarifying exactly what systems one is referring to when attempting to state the relative sustainability of a given process. Thus, it would be quite plausible for Alex to state that, in terms of economic systems, he feels he can only experience trust when relationships are durable and resilient, which consequently is a demonstration of sustainability; yet, for interpersonal relations between people in terms of shared norms, knowledge or beliefs, the spontaneous creation of trust feels most sustainable.

Equity

Equity, and the processes associated with it, is mentioned by Thin (2002) as a truly *social* indicator of sustainability. In a social context, equity is generally understood to refer to equal opportunities, justice, and respect for universal human rights across class, gender or other status divides. Equity was a much contested concept at Cedar

River, yet, in general, all seemed to agree that the concept abstractly represented something that they, as a community, were striving for. In local ideology, equity generally appeared to encompass values such as equal access to resources and participation in community affairs, and non-discrimination. In practice, however, equity became conflated with entitlement and equality and led to never-ending discussions in regard to how one judges these and what constitutes either. One of the first memorable quotes I wrote down from a decision-making meeting at Cedar River was "Fair does not always mean equal" (Jim, Sept. 2006). What Jim was suggesting in this statement was that demonstrating equity, in the context of Cedar River, did not hinge on ensuring equality across the board, but rather ensuring that everyone was having their needs met, including the community-as-a-whole. Thus, equity would contribute to social sustainability.

Fukuyama (2000) mentions that social orders that are predominantly the result of spontaneous social capital creation are somewhat troublesome and usually unsustainable because they tend to require very specific conditions under which they can work (p.107). To back up this claim, Fukuyama cites the work of Elinor Ostrom[23] who conducted research on communities in relation to the popular theory known as the "tragedy of the commons". The "tragedy of the commons", simply put, refers to the fall-out that occurs between individual interests and those of the common good (see Hardin 1968). Ostrom's research found that group size, membership boundaries, degree of repeated interaction, prior establishment of cultural norms, unequal power relations, and persistent bad choices were all factors that seemed to explain why spontaneous creation of social capital within a given community may not make for a sustainable social order, particularly in the areas of access to common resources, shared responsibility, and reliability.

This assessment absolutely illuminates some of the reasons behind the difficulties that Cedar River, as a community, repeatedly had with the actualisation of equity, and thus social sustainability. Most significantly, the boundaries of Cedar River were quite fluid during the time of my fieldwork, which meant that there was a portion of the residents that were transient. The transient folks were mainly interns,

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[23] For instance: Ostrom E. (1990) *Governing the commons: the evolution of institutions for collective action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

work-traders, renters and students, but to some degree one could classify shorter-term members as transient considering that the average member only remained at Cedar River for approximately two to three years. Transient individuals, in Ostrom's explanation, have less incentive to carry their share of responsibility. At Cedar River, this particular issue was most evident in relation to interns and work-traders; however, the issue was two-sided. On the one hand, certain interns and work-traders were of the attitude that doing just enough work to get by was satisfactory and the rest of their time at Cedar River was spent enjoying the various benefits provided by the land and the community. Thus, some amount of free-loading took place, causing undue strain on the communally-shared resources. On the other hand, certain community members either placed unrealistic expectations on their interns and work-traders or failed to provide ample support to them. This led to feelings of resentment from both community members – who felt resentful of those interns or work-traders who were perceived to have been given an equal opportunity but had failed to live up to the individual's or the group's expectations – and the unsupported interns or work-traders – who felt that their time and labour was being exploited for the community-as-a-whole.

The transience of actual community membership, as opposed to community residence, had different consequences for the community. As I have mentioned at various points throughout the thesis, people tended to leave Cedar River when it was felt that the beliefs, values and morals by which he/she was attempting to live his/her life were no longer aligned with the community-as-a-whole or when it was felt that said beliefs, values and morals were not being realised in the context of Cedar River. Thus, the transience of community members does not really tell us anything about equity, per se, but may be a reflection on the overall social sustainability of Cedar River as a community. Can a community with such a high turnover rate be considered socially sustainable? The answer to this depends on our definition of sustainability which, as I mentioned in the beginning of this section, does not exist in any agreed-upon fashion. Furthermore, my project is not to judge the relative sustainability of Cedar River, but rather to understand residents' perceptions of life at Cedar River in relation to the concept of sustainability. However, I will suggest that a high turnover rate in community membership is not necessarily an indicator of a

socially unsustainable *community*, particularly if we consider the community separately from the individuals which comprise it. In other words, if we consider Cedar River as an entity within which community exists, then we could argue that community has been sustained at Cedar River for approximately twenty years and thus the social processes one witnesses at Cedar River are sustaining of community, whether or not the social processes are sustainable for any given individual.

There was also reluctance on the part of some residents at Cedar River to reassess certain choices that had been made in the past, but were perhaps no longer relevant or suited to the present community membership. This led to the persistence of inefficient and unproductive norms, which sometimes felt disempowering to certain residents and in turn added to the community's complications with equitable policies. Perhaps the most obvious example of this problem can be taken from the weekly Core Group and Intention Circle meetings. As was discussed in Chapter Three, Intention Circle was a forum for the entire community to come together and make decisions by consensus on various issues concerning both community life and the non-profit educational centre run by the community residents, and Core Group was a consensus meeting attended by a selection of members that happened prior to Intention Circle so as to consolidate the decision-making process. A reoccurring issue, which I certainly had noticed but had also been the topic of many a conversation with the organisational coordinator, was remarked upon by one of the shorter-term members in my interview with her:

> … it seems like some meetings I've been to have been really tight and really well run and people say what they need to say. And there have been other meetings where it seems like there are a few strong personalities that like to take it and run off with it and, you know, just kind of bugger up the process.
>
> (Tina, Interview Sept. 13, 2007)

In the excerpt above, Tina was referring to the fact that, during meetings, certain longer-term members were wont to throw in some circumstance from times past or precedence that had been set regarding a particular issue whether or not said circumstance or precedent was actually appropriate in the current situation. For example, on one particular occasion, a soon-to-be-full community member had proposed to the Core Group that the monetary contribution he would make to the

community in the instance of being granted full membership[24] be used to buy a new van for making food runs, as the current one was very decrepit. All of the Core Group members were in agreement that this was a great idea and should be put to the whole community in the form of a recommendation at Intention Circle. However, one community member, who had been living at Cedar River longer than anyone else, expressed doubts regarding the validity of this proposal. She stated that, in the past, the mandatory contribution was not earmarked, but was placed into a particular fund which got used when the entire community decided they wanted to use it for something. She also stated a few other reasons why she was sceptical of the proposal and she appeared so concerned about this issue to the extent that she was seemingly unwilling to see it go forward and be decided on by the whole community – a move that would essentially be thwarting the whole decision-making process that had been put in place.

Later that week, the resident who made the original proposal approached the long-term resident and expressed his dissatisfaction with her handling of the entire situation, at which point she apologised and stated that perhaps a misunderstanding had taken place, but more importantly that she was struggling with the idea of policies changing and decisions being made without respect for the policies and decisions of the past. I happened to be present for this admission and took it to mean that, according to this resident's thinking, decisions that were made in the past, regardless of whether or not they pertained to, or were helpful for, the current situation and membership, should persist in order to show respect for those decisions. Furthermore, it seemed like, because this particular resident had been living at Cedar River the longest, deferring to past decisions allowed her to maintain a certain level of power that others did not hold, simply because she was the only keeper of past knowledge. Thus, Ostrom's suggestion that persistent bad choices and unequal power relations may be indicators of social unsustainabilities helps us to illuminate more objectively areas of social life wherein Cedar River residents were struggling to pursue and demonstrate sustainability.

Of course, equity is also concerned with people in distant places and future generations. This is perhaps the social process that is articulated most clearly in

[24] It was a requirement of every resident that became a full community member that he/she would make a contribution of $750.00 to the community.

relation to sustainability as it is most popularly understood via the Brundtland definition of sustainable development: *development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*. For residents at Cedar River, this side of equity appeared to me more easily actualised. There was a pervading belief among residents that everyone, anywhere in the world, had the right to enjoy the same opportunities as anybody else. In other words, individuals should not consume more than their fair share of resources so that there is enough left for everybody else.

On a community-wide scale, this meant living more simply than the average American – for example, keeping small domestic living spaces, wearing primarily second-hand clothes, and foregoing most luxury or unnecessary goods. Almost every resident at Cedar River appeared satisfied by this voluntary simplicity. It also meant promoting practices and policies that give each person, anywhere in the world, access to a good quality of life. An example of this behaviour that I already mentioned above was Mary's promotion of Community Land Trusts as a way to keep housing affordable in The U.S.

Furthermore, this belief in equity extended to people not yet born, which suggests a distinct awareness of temporality among Cedar River residents. In other words, pursuing sustainability via inter-generational equity objectives –such as voluntary simplicity – becomes a way of representing communal beliefs regarding the value of the future and the meaning of the present (Munn 1990, 1992). Below is another example of behaviour that I witnessed at Cedar River which was grounded in the notion of equity. In the following interview excerpt I had just asked Kate what her ideal vision of Cedar River would look like.

> **Kate:** I would be part of a circle of people who want to make mindful choices about the resources they use, of all sorts – physical and not physical. And for whom mindful choices means considering the effects on all the people in the world and not the effects on them and their family only. To give an example of what I mean by that, if I eat organic food, it's not 'cause I think I'll get sick if I don't. It's really not. It's not 'cause I think it's healthier for my body. I'll eat anything, but I won't *buy* anything because I don't want to give any money to someone who's going to spray their fields while their workers are in there working in them.
> **Me:** Uh-huh
> **Kate:** You know, so that's where…and the run-off in the rivers, you know. It's not about what's healthy for me.

> **Me:** Right. OK.
> **Kate:** That's a great side-effect. I mean, I know I need to care about what's healthy for me, but who will make their choices based on trying to create more justice in the world. Smaller footprint because we don't have enough for everyone, you know. Not because it's going to crash and we better be used to living that way already so that we'll be better able to. So that *we'll* be OK. So there's a kind of really fundamental difference there where the results can look the same, but the reasoning behind it feels really different. That would be really important. That we care about everyone and not just about us. And we try to live well for everyone's sake.
>
> (Interview Aug. 29, 2007)

My intention with the last two sub-sections was to demonstrate the ways in which Cedar River residents were engaging with the concepts of trust and equity, and to some extent solidarity, as the social processes defined by these concepts have been identified as indicators of social sustainability (Thin 2002). I did so in an attempt to illuminate how the social processes defined by these concepts took on meaning – in idiosyncratic and contradicting ways - for Cedar River residents in relation to the pursuit of sustainability, in order that I might provide more empirical data as to possible sites of socially sustainable behaviour. Of course, social sustainability is just one facet of the overarching concept of sustainability. The goal of social sustainability, like that of ecological sustainability, "emerged from a sense that we need to put a brake on economic development, as this is traditionally understood" (Holland 1999: 46). Thus, the final section of this chapter attempts to make explicit the parallels between the theories produced in relation to development, in particular 'sustainable development', and the experimentation that was taking place at Cedar River, so as to make clear how pursuing sustainability in the context of an intentional community like Cedar River works to confer superlative meaning on the lives of residents.

Sustainable Development and Intentional Communities

In its most common usage in anthropological literature, 'development' is thought to refer to "processes of social and economic change which have been precipitated by economic growth, and/or specific policies and plans, whether at the level of the state, donor agencies or indigenous social movements" (Gardner and Lewis 1996: 25). Olivier de Sardan, among others, disagrees with this definition of development, as he feels development only refers to changes instigated by persons outside of the social

milieu in question (2005). Meadowcroft (1999), on the other hand, argues that the introduction of the concept of 'sustainable development' into development discourse implies "a broadening application of the term 'development' to include also the continuing evolution of social, economic and political conditions in industrialised regions of the globe" (pg 17). I am in agreement with Meadowcroft's suggestion as that conception of development more clearly suggests that it occurs in so-called "developed" nations, as well as in areas of the global South; and further, that development can occur within the social milieu that instigates it.

As I have made clear throughout the thesis, intentional communities are self-aware social experiments that are created in order for their residents to realise, in their daily lives, certain beliefs, values, ethics and morals relating to all variety of social and environmental interaction. To put it another way, intentional communities are explicitly about the realisation of some vision of social change which, when realised to whatever extent, will increase community residents' overall quality of life. In the case of Cedar River more specifically, the types of change promoted are those that are understood as making the community, and ideally the whole of American society, more ecologically and socially sustainable than it currently is. Thus, sustainability and well-being are the two concepts in this thesis that are framed as individual and community-wide 'projects'.

It became apparent to me, after countless hours of meetings, numerous informal discussions with residents, and forty-some formal interviews, that the general version of sustainability objectives that were subscribed to on a group level was very similar to those which are associated with sustainable development discourses. Kenny and Meadowcroft (1999) state that sustainable development works to re-orient the "'meta objectives' of a given society – by raising questions about different possible social trajectories through which the society may move and then by promoting some of these as more 'sustainable' than others" (p.4). In *Social Progress and Sustainable Development*, Thin (2002) sums up the core elements of sustainable development objectives as the following:

- Progress: improving the quality of life (multidimensional, and better than a basic minimum)
- Justice (universal human rights for present and future generations, and equity more generally)

- Durability (achieving progress that is lasting and which does not unduly restrict options for several generations to come)
- Stability/resilience (being adaptive and avoiding excessive fluctuation; ability to recover quickly from shocks)

(p.13)

It must be noted that, during my entire residence at Cedar River, I never saw any sustainability objectives laid out in such a clear and concise manner. However, to one degree or another, as I have established in this chapter, all were being considered. In other words, through their daily activities and decisions, based on both individual and group assumptions of what sustainability refers to, the residents of Cedar River were providing a dynamic model of ways to address social progress in the U.S. today.

Conclusion

Sustainability is a contested concept that is primarily concerned with the future of humankind and the environments that support human settlements. As there is currently no certainty in regard to a model of what constitutes sustainability, identifying certain practices and processes as unsustainable provides a solid first step towards locating more sustainable practices and processes. At Cedar River, many of the processes and practices that were deemed unsustainable were those associated with 'mainstream' American society. Thus, the demonstrations of ecological and social sustainability present at Cedar River were often juxtaposed to 'mainstream' alternatives. However, demonstrations of sustainability were shown to vary between the group and individual level, and from resident to resident, which leads to a consideration of the beliefs, values and morals inherent in conceptions of sustainability. Essentially, the pursuit of sustainability is both idiosyncratic and ongoing, and, as such, is difficult to judge in terms of success.

Nonetheless, the potential role of intentional communities, such as Cedar River, in generating educational tools aimed at social progress and sustainable development in industrialised nations, such as the United States, must be considered. Intentional communities are practical experiments that make use of many of the same 'development' objectives as do local and state governments, as well as large international organisations. In particular, many intentional communities are

particularly focussed on experimenting with social sustainability which remains much less understood than ecological sustainability.

Ultimately, as the pursuit of ecological and social sustainability can be understood as a project for the residents of Cedar River, and the pursuit of projects thought to confer superlative meaning on the lives of those who pursue them, understanding how daily activities come to be seen as meaningful in relation to this project illuminates how it is that intentional community provides a fruitful context for the experience of a meaningful life. I shall end the chapter with a quote from Ted, one of the longer-term residents of Cedar River, as it both illustrates the depth of meaning that can be attached to the concept of sustainability, and leads us into the final chapter of this thesis which is explicitly concerned with the other project being pursued at Cedar River, namely well-being.

> I don't think anything in the physical world is really sustainable. We're all going to die and [Cedar River], these buildings, are not going to be here forever. None of this stuff is sustainable to me. I mean, it's true. It's not. They're not. So, to me what sustainable means is that something is indefinitely maintainable, and transpersonally. Like when I die, someone else will be able to come in and take my place. Or when I leave or whatever, that things can go on. That our relationships can go on.
>
> And, on a deeper level, what I mean by that is that these things make us happy. I think that's what's really sustainable is that we are in touch with who we really are. Which we really are, in my opinion…I firmly believe at our core we're joy. And we…when we're in touch with that joy, we're doing things that can go on and on and on. It's like joy is inexhaustible. And getting distracted from that is exhausting. So that's what sustainable means to me.
>
> (Interview Aug. 11, 2007)

Chapter Seven

Well-being: Not Strictly a Self-Reflective Assessment

Well-being, as yet, remains a somewhat elusive topic of discussion in anthropology. In his contribution to a recent edited collection on the anthropology of well-being, Neil Thin (2009) makes a convincing case for why anthropology, as a discipline, must begin to analyse, in earnest, well-being. The final line of his piece is particularly pertinent to the aims of this thesis. Thin concludes, "By developing an anthropology of well-being, we will greatly improve our ability to offer culturally sophisticated contributions towards making the world a better place for people to live in" (2009: 41).

Thin's (2009) statement is significant to this thesis for two reasons. The first is that it describes, in no uncertain terms, one of the practical aims of my research. In order to clarify what I mean by this, I shall reveal the second, and perhaps more important, reason why this statement is significant. The residents of Cedar River, and the various other people who were participants in my research, shared in this same desire: to make the world a better place for us all to live in. More precisely, the participants in my research were, in a sense, making their own study of well-being via pursuing it as a project. The residents of Cedar River, and many of their associates, were attempting to make meaningful contributions to the world on a daily basis through a variety of intentional (and some unintentional) practices that essentially were aimed at exploring new ways to increase their own, and others, experience of life satisfaction. Therefore, by focussing on well-being, both in the socio-cultural context of Cedar River and as an analytic concept, I am not only engaging with a concept that my research participants were themselves engaging with, but I am also allowing the ethnographic description that results to provide a testament to some of the ways in which the world might be made a better place for people to live in.

The majority of this chapter will centre ethnographically on the various activities and practices that I witnessed on a regular basis at Cedar River which were intended to increase personal and community-wide well-being. These activities are

distinguished as "concerns" in order to highlight the fact that these activities are organised *by the Cedar River community* and they operate as a means through which the community itself might assess well-being. The aim is to illuminate both how certain activities such as well-being meetings, hot tub nights, or open microphone events were seen to explicitly contribute to well-being at Cedar River, and how well-being was being conceived of by the residents themselves. This account sets up a platform from which to demonstrate the tension that exists between intentional - or planned - attempts by residents at providing themselves with solutions to their own - and the organisation's - quest for existential meaning, and the unplanned experiences of well-being that occur by virtue of engagement with one's environment. Thus, one portion of the chapter is an analysis of ethnographic instances of activities which I argue contribute to both individual and community-wide well-being in an unplanned manner. The analysis implicates the role of cultural values and morals in the experience of well-being for the residents themselves, which leads me to a final analysis of ethnographic instances of the pursuit of pleasure. This sets up the concluding argument, being that certain values and morals may inhibit well-being to an extent, as they fail to allow for full recognition of the value inherent in personally rewarding experiences. The final two analyses are framed in terms of short-term versus long-term orientations to well-being.

A Concept Under Consideration

Well-being, as an analytical concept in the social sciences, is commonly used by economists, psychologists, sociologists and public health specialists as a way of identifying, in both objective and subjective terms, those factors of everyday life that contribute to health, happiness and quality of life (Matthews and Izquierdo 2009). While the research hitherto carried out has produced much useful data, the statistical nature of it has tended to cause scepticism among anthropologists due to the distinct lack of interpretive details – be they cultural, contextual or otherwise – included in such research. Historically, when anthropologists have attempted to address well-being, they have done so in a culturally specific manner, which allows little opportunity for knowledge enhancing cross-cultural analysis. The very nature of well-being as experiential has caused it to be judged as problematic and, as a result, most studies chose to focus on the converse state - ill-being - which appears more

accessible to those who are only interested in what is socially constructed (Thin 2002, 2009). While it is, of course, useful to understand the factors of social life that contribute to suffering and ill-health, it is equally useful and necessary to think about those aspects of life that contribute to health, happiness and satisfaction.

In the introduction to *Pursuits of Happiness: Well-being in Anthropological Perspective*, the authors suggest that well-being "connotes being well psychologically, physically and socio-economically, and…culturally", while also stressing that conceptions of well-being differ across social and cultural contexts (Matthews and Izquierdo 2009: 3). Thin (2009), in the same volume, attempts to provide a set of analytical tools with which we might approach well-being by creating a list of axes along which the various meanings attached to "well-being" might be distinguished. Among others, he includes experiential vs. conceptual or evaluative approaches to well-being, egocentric vs. sociocentric assessments of well-being, subjective vs. objective explanations of well-being, as well as short-term vs. long-term orientations to well-being. Identification of these axes, and thus the differentiations of meaning attached to the concept of well-being, can aid us in making clear analytical statements with regard to specific aspects of everyday life that become the focus of ethnography.

In this chapter, I use the four axes of meaning differentiation stated above as a means of organizing and identifying the ways in which well-being was being addressed and conceptualised at Cedar River. I also use them as a means by which to organise the types of analysis made by myself. The following list is a clarification of what is meant by the terms being used to distinguish the various meanings of "well-being" throughout the chapter, informed primarily by the descriptions provided by Thin (2009:33-35):

- Egocentric vs. Sociocentric Concern/Assessments – distinguishes between a focus on well-being in relation to individuals and that of well-being in relation to social systems and relations
- Subjective vs. Objective Well-being – distinguishes between the actual experience of feeling good and treating the experience of feeling good as an object of study

- Experiential vs. Conceptual or Evaluative Approach – distinguishes between actual experiences of well-being and conceptualisations (mainly my analysis of Cedar River residents' conceptualisations) of well-being
- Short-term vs. Long-term Orientation – distinguishes between momentary and selfish pleasures, and more lasting and pro-social life-satisfaction

In order to highlight the use of well-being in each instance, I have included indicators in the form of sub-section titles. It is my intention that the analysis made in this chapter be capable of contributing to the cross-cultural analysis of well-being.

The Well-being Meeting

Egocentric and Sociocentric Concern

The very first entry that I made into my fieldnote diary took place at a well-being meeting on the second evening of my stay at Cedar River. Well-being meetings took place fortnightly and were semi-structured events to which all community residents, and usually community visitors, were encouraged to attend. I later discovered that well-being meetings were seen by many residents as an important venue in which the processes that worked to maintain and increase personal and inter-personal happiness could be practiced; thus, analytically speaking, well-being meetings were a medium through which well-being was being addressed by the Cedar River community with a view to both ego- and socio-centric assessment. On this particular evening, after each person present had called themselves into the circle[25], the well-being facilitator passed a stone around the circle and asked each person to talk, in turn, about who they are. This topic of discussion was chosen, I assume, because many guests were staying on the property at the time and this would provide a means of publicly introducing oneself. The facilitator, who I later learned was chosen for each meeting on a voluntary basis, also instructed us that we did not have to speak when the stone reached us if we chose not to. In practice, everyone did.

The first person to receive the stone asked that we each discuss "joy", as well as who we are, as this was a topic she had been recently contemplating. For the most part, people complied with her request. After everyone had spoken, we were asked

[25] I have described the process of "calling-in" in some depth in Chapter Three, but essentially "calling-in" was the ritualised way in which Cedar River residents and guests made themselves officially present at structured gatherings.

to break into "triads", meaning groups of three, and take the opportunity to "connect" with our group members on a deeper level. The facilitator suggested that we might want to talk about something that was on our minds or ask for something that we felt we needed from our group members, such as a massage. My two partners were Arthur and Barbara. Barbara went first and decided she wanted to use her portion of the time, which was about twenty minutes, to discuss some issues that had been on her mind recently. Arthur and I listened, sometimes asking questions, and when she was done, I was asked to go next. I decided to use the time to learn more about Arthur and Barbara, in particular why they had decided to move to Cedar River. They both agreed to share their stories with me, though Arthur did ask that I also answer my own question. Finally, Arthur had his twenty minutes and asked if we would use the time to give him a massage because his back was very sore. When the triads were done, we came back together as a whole group, held hands in a circle and called ourselves out. Many people also said some words of thanks for the opportunity to be part of the well-being session.

The Well-being of Well-being Meetings

An Objective Assessment of Subjective Experience

I never did ask either Barbara or Arthur, or anyone else for that matter, what participating in that particular well-being meeting did for them; however I did reflect, later that evening, on my own experience. Thus, the analysis I provide here is an objective assessment of my own subjective experience. The initial activity of passing the stone around the circle and sharing with the group actually turned out to be fairly significant for me. As the stone moved around the circle, I was not so much focused on what the others were sharing, but was rather focused inward, desperately trying to figure out what I wanted to share. The first time the stone came to me, I passed it without saying a word. When it returned for the second time, I began the speech I had rehearsed in my head, something about being an anthropology PhD student and feeling excited to finally arrive at my field-site. And then something unexpected occurred. I began to speak about the uncertainties that being an anthropologist awoke in me. I found myself thanking the group for being open to my presence in their community and told them that their collective kindness was already beginning to allay some of my fears. My body suddenly got warm all over and I felt

a change occur to my overall sense of being. I quickly passed the stone so as to regain my composure, but I later realized that the whole ordeal had actually been profoundly positive for me.

The most obvious result of the sharing experience was a visceral sense of excitement, mixed with relief. I *felt* good for having expressed my fears and gratitude publicly. However, I also experienced a sense of connection to the other people sitting in the room just by virtue of having them witness my vulnerability, seemingly without judgment. This sense of connection with the group also *felt* good. I can easily claim now that the sharing activity at the start of the well-being meeting increased my sense of subjective well-being by affording me the experiences of excitement - at my own loss of control - and connection - at the seemingly supportive reception from the group.

Conceptual Understanding

Though I am hesitant to claim that each person present at that meeting shared the same experience as myself, I am confident that the experience of support received, either from the group as a whole or individual members of the group, is central to the residents' conception of the well-being of well-being meetings at Cedar River. In other words, well-being, in this context, is understood to derive from both the format of group sharing and the more intimate inter-personal exchanges that are interpreted as displays of support for one's own self. This was reiterated to me by multiple Cedar River residents, though two conversations in particular stand out. The first came after an Intention Circle meeting in which it was proposed that well-being meetings get moved to an earlier time over the winter months due to the fact that many residents retire earlier when it gets dark in the late afternoon. The proposer thought that this change would perhaps encourage better attendance to the meetings which had recently become very small, or sometimes non-existent. There was minimal discussion during the meeting; however one resident did second the motion on the basis that he was experiencing a "disconnect" between community members which he was attributing to low well-being meeting attendance. After the meeting, I approached Eldin, who had made the proposal, and asked him what his overall opinion of well-being meetings were. He replied that he generally likes the idea of them because of positive experiences in the past, though he felt recently that the

meetings were lacking. Eldin added, in an enthusiastic tone, that he did, however, receive the "support" and "reinforcement" that well-being meetings provide, when functioning properly, on a daily basis if he asks for it from those around him. This, he said, was something he really "valued" about living at Cedar River.

The second conversation occurred the evening before my conversation with Eldin while spending time with Darius, one of the community members involved, to a large degree, with Cedar River's personal growth programme. Darius told me that the well-being meetings of late "sucked". However, he was not particularly concerned as he receives all the "support" he needs, and would otherwise get at well-being meetings, from the group of people in charge of organizing the personal growth courses, assuming they are functioning properly, which currently they were. Notably, it was over the period of time, which lasted for several months, during which the occurrence and attendance of well-being meetings was ebbing that I heard the most about the goods derived from such meetings. Each narrative revolved around the connections that were made during the meetings between community residents. The result of these inter-personal connections was feeling supported.

Support, as it was explained to me, contributed to emotional, mental and bodily well-being. Though I did not interrogate the distinction the residents were making between these categories in great depth, I got the sense that emotional well-being, in this context, was understood as being able to allow oneself an uninhibited release of emotions, while mental well-being was understood as being clear and open about one's own present state of mind, and bodily well-being was understood as the experience of a clear flow of energies running throughout the body. These conceptions of well-being, it must be remembered, speak only to the social process of support experienced through the interpersonal connections made at well-being meetings. Surely emotional, mental and bodily well-being were understood to be derived from alternative processes, be they social or individual. For instance, on one occasion that I was aware of, there was a massage well-being meeting during which we were instructed in multiple types of massage which we then tried out on each other. This was another way of "being in our bodies" - Cedar River personal growth speak for paying attention to bodily sensations (derived mainly from the teachings of Gestalt Therapy which theorises that all human needs are experienced bodily and

when needs are thwarted a crisis ensues) - that was socially recognised as contributing to well-being. Nonetheless, it is significant that the process/processes of acceptance and recognition – support - by the group, or at least other residents, of the emotional, psychological and physical dimensions of one's everyday experience of the self, are understood to contribute to well-being.

Emotion Work as Personal Development and Communal Well-being

Egocentric and Sociocentric Concern

The emphasis on support as a significant factor in the creation of well-being can be linked to the belief system, and resulting rhetoric, that is put forth in the personal development courses offered at Cedar River. The programme is run by a group of community members and non-members and consists of a progression of courses through which participants are encouraged to become "present" with all aspects of themselves and each other. The majority if community residents had taken part in at least one of the courses offered, and many took part multiple times or were involved with its continuing production. By taking the courses, one is indoctrinated into a set of practices, accompanied by a distinct use of language, which are deemed helpful tools for coming to an awareness of the emotions being felt by, as well as the wants and needs, of oneself and others. The techniques and language practiced in the personal development courses spilled over into the general community practices and thus served as a common community-wide set of tools with which Cedar River residents were able to address aspects of well-being. It was a common occurrence to hear either a community resident or a personal development course participant state that he/she was in need of some support, which was the accepted code word for asking someone to listen to or "witness" one's expression of the thoughts and feelings one was experiencing, as well as the bodily release of emotions.

One might deem such practices as a form of emotion work. In his discussion of physical, mental and social well-being among the Toraja of Indonesia, Hollan conceives of the strategies Toraja use to "consciously manage inner feelings in socially appropriate ways" as self-directed emotion work (1992: 49). Hollan borrows the phrase "emotion work" from Hochschild (1979), who originally conceived of its use in order to bridge the gap between unconscious acts of emotion management and conscious acts focussed on one's outward behaviour (ibid). This

emotion work is deemed necessary for the Toraja, he claims, in order to prevent inner thoughts or feelings that are troubling and unpleasant from escaping, thereby causing social, emotional and physical ill-health. Likewise, in both the personal development courses and the well-being meetings, Cedar River residents are engaging in emotion work. Yet, unlike the Toraja, the residents of Cedar River seek to recognise and share their inner thoughts, feelings and bodily experiences with other community residents. Consequently, "processing" and expressing such emotions, thoughts, and bodily experiences, for instance in the context of the structured and supportive well-being meetings, becomes one of the socially-defined ways of addressing emotional, mental and bodily well-being.

Objective Assessment of Subjective Experience

For the most part, this process was seen as positive, perhaps due to the quality of social interaction it entailed (as was discussed in both Chapter 2 and 6), and often left residents, my self included, with a sense of increased happiness and overall wellness. Occasionally, however, I did hear residents describe the emphasis placed on this process at Cedar River as "tiresome" and "draining", which suggested to me that there was an expectation that thoughts and emotions, once expressed, would be dealt with and moved past. This suspicion was further confirmed and illuminated when I came across a list entitled "Symptoms of Being out of Relationship, Disconnected", and another entitled "Indicators of Being in Relationship, Feeling Connected", both of which were contained on a worksheet entitled *Assessing Community Well-being* that I received during the Community Orientation Program. The lists had been devised about seven years before I arrived at Cedar River by a well-respected community member who had subsequently chosen to leave the community. Under the list of "Indicators of Being in Relationship, Feeling Connected", two bullet points caught my eye: "Emotions are visible/acknowledged/supported" and "Taking responsibility for our own emotions (not dumping or blaming, being vulnerable, seeing others as allies)". The first point is quite clear and generally reiterates that there is in fact a distinct socially defined way of demonstrating emotional, mental and bodily well-being at Cedar River. However the second point is somewhat ambiguous and leaves room for interpretation. From my observations, I take the second point to mean that there is also a socially appropriate manner of *expressing*

one's inner thoughts, feelings and emotions that is evidenced by the audience walking away from an expressive encounter feeling free of blame, having been able to offer support and generally valued as an ally.

Conceptual Understanding

This *Assessing Community Well-being* list suggests some interesting features of well-being as it was being conceived of at Cedar River. An explicit call is being made for residents to reflect on the experience of self in order to establish communal well-being. In other words, according to this list, self-consciousness allows for "connection" to other members of the group, and connection is one form of community well-being. Indeed, Damasio (2000) notes that "the ultimate consequences of human emotion and feeling pivot on consciousness" (p.37). Therefore, in order for feelings to have an effect on the person experiencing them, that person must be conscious. In other words, that person must become aware of him/her self as the person experiencing the feelings. By suggesting that the process of reflection on the self leads to connection, and thus well-being, Cedar River residents are implying that the well self must be a self that is constantly aware of its own identity (this point will be expanded further in the section entitled "Play and the Unreflective Experience of Well-being").

Furthermore, it could be assumed from this list that community well-being is thought to equal, or lead to, personal well-being. Yet, it is conceivable that one might feel his/her self to be well if they have had an outburst of emotions, perhaps in a blaming manner, walk away to get him/her self back to a relaxed state without allowing audience members to offer support, and return feeling indifferent as to whether audience members are allies or adversaries. It is here that the role of cultural values and morals must be taken into consideration in relation to emotional, mental and bodily well-being.

We must ask ourselves if, within this framework, Cedar River residents really could feel well if they chose to behave in the manner I just described as a conceivable scenario, considering "support" is an essential component of the expressive process which, as we have already established, is one of the socially defined ways to address emotional, mental and bodily well-being. Surely, conflicting interests would arise between fulfilment of personal desires and

community desires, which, to make matters even more complicated, are often internalised as personal desires due to the emphasis on 'community' at Cedar River. In fact, this very scenario highlights the tension between communal and individual experiences of well-being. A self-reflective assessment of well-being on the part of community residents, which is what primarily becomes the focus of communal efforts towards goal fulfilment in relation to well-being does not necessarily result in communal well-being as it has been conceived of in documents like the one I mentioned above. This is due to the fact that not every resident holds the same values in relation to what constitutes well-being, though they all might agree that it is a worthwhile project to pursue it. Certainly self-reflection – sometimes referred to by Cedar River residents as "consciousness" – is valued by the community-as-a-whole and is thought to lead to a more meaningful life. However, the ways in which the "conscious" or reflective self is thought to demonstrate well-being are far from agreed upon.

Open Mics and Hot Tub Nights

Egocentric and Sociocentric Concern

Although not formally named as a well-being practice, hot tub nights were explicitly seen as a luxury for Cedar River members to enjoy. Hot tub nights occurred on a weekly or fortnightly basis (though sometimes there would be a few weeks in a row with no hot tub), and generally took place on the evening of the day on which the hot tub was scrubbed as part of the weekly cleaning party. Officially, the hot tub was reserved for community members[26] only and other residents or visitors had to be invited by a member to join, though in my experience anyone was welcome to attend as long as they did not detract in any way from the experience of others. Generally, on a day when the hot tub had been lit, news quickly travelled around the community that there would be a hot tub and people were encouraged to help look after the fire that warmed it. I could always feel the excitement brewing by the end of dinner, and

[26] Community members are distinct from residents in that they have paid certain membership fees and, more importantly, been subject to a series of membership reviews. The reviews are a process during which the reviewee is asked to share his/her thoughts and feelings on his/her experiences at Cedar River up-to-date and the reviewers (being the other members) are asked to give feedback on their experiences with the person up for review. One could say that members have more of a stake in Cedar River than residents do.

shortly after, through the window of my fairly central cabin, I could see people wandering by wrapped in towels or bathrobes, headed down to the tub.

The tub, which was made out of wooden slats and heated by a clever aluminium stove contraption, fit six to eight adults comfortably; but often times others would sit around on the deck and take turns soaking. It was undoubtedly a social event, at least in the early part of the evening, where naked bathers relaxed, told stories, and sometimes even surreptitiously imbibed an alcoholic drink or two. Not everyone was fond of the hot tub, but those that were spoke of the experience with high regard. For some, the hot tub was seen as a therapeutic resource for aching body parts, while others saw it simply as an opportunity to socialise outdoors, under the stars, in a physically enjoyable setting. No matter the explanation, upon being questioned further, residents almost always agreed that hot tub nights were about pleasure.

Open microphone nights were another type of activity aimed at creating pleasure. These nights, which became regular monthly events about half-way into my fieldwork, were viewed by every resident of Cedar River as prime opportunities for having fun and being creative. They started as a result of a new resident, Nicole, identifying a need for organised gatherings in which community residents could enjoy, in a group fashion, the artistic creations of each other. They generally lasted between two and three hours and the majority of performances were collaborations between at least two residents. Nicole usually acted as the master of ceremonies, getting residents and visitors to sign-up for time slots and introducing each performance between acts. Performances ranged from comedy to poetry readings to multi-piece band acts, though most of the performances were of a musical nature.

It was not unusual to hear people singing or playing instruments, especially in the evenings at Cedar River; however, during the week of each open microphone event, the visible and audible acts of music-making were experienced to a much greater extent. Regular performers became identified with particular genres, such as folk or rock music, and new acts surfaced nearly every time, providing excitement through variety. The most sophisticated musical collaboration, which later was thought of as the community band, was certainly one of the most anticipated acts each time they played. With their electric instruments and talented musicians, they

could be counted on to create a truly festive atmosphere, generally inspiring dancing among the crowd. Open microphone nights provided a venue for residents to have the experience of performing in front of others, and likewise created a space that was accessible to all community residents to view performance. This, like the hot tub, was also a luxury for many residents who either rarely made it into town or simply did not have the means to pay for performances.

The Experience of (Culturally Specific) Pleasure

Objective Assessment of Subjective Experience

Both the hot tub and the open microphone nights were planned events, intended for the experience of socially sanctioned pleasure, and thus well-being. In other words, they were organised social events, generally available to all community residents, which promoted the experience of group joy through activities that were aligned with communal values and ethics. The ways in which they did so, however, are simultaneously (nearly) universal, idiosyncratic and culturally specific (Clark 2009). Pleasure, as a sensory response to some form of stimulus is, as we all know, a nearly universal human trait. No one would be surprised that bodily well-being was thought, by most residents, to be enhanced by soaking in the hot tub or dancing to the band at open microphone events. Additionally, there is much evidence to suggest that the capacity to derive pleasure or joy from group festivity - dancing, making music, etc. – is also a universal human trait, evolved in order to allow for solidarity among sizeable groups (See Ehrenreich 2007). Moreover, I think we all would agree that pleasure is idiosyncratic in that the experience of it, to some extent, is shaped by personal histories. Yet, as Clark (2009) has illustrated in relation to his ethnographic account of Japanese bathing, pleasure has a cultural dimension which is determined by the specifics of the context of pleasure. This point, in particular, is significant in order to understand how the experience of pleasure is linked to conceptions of well-being at Cedar River.

Conceptual Understanding - Nudity

Beyond the physiological reactions the residents' bodies had when immersed in the hot water of the tub - for instance muscle relaxation, the opening of pores on the skin and increased blood flow - all of which were thought to contribute to bodily well-

being, a range of psychological experiences were also evident. The most apparent experience resulted from the act of bathing naked. Nudity held a very important status at Cedar River. The act of being nude was viewed by residents from various perspectives, all of which were articulated in opposition to a perceived mainstream American culture. Being nude was understood to denote a level of comfort with one's body, regardless of societal norms or specifications, and it was also explicitly articulated as a political act in the name of gender equality. In order to illustrate these points more clearly, I offer a couple of brief ethnographic examples.

It was clear to me from day one at Cedar River that nudity was very much accepted on public display. As part of the tour of the property that our group received from Maryanne during the Community Orientation Programme, we inspected the outdoor showers. While doing so, Maryanne, a long-term community member, relayed an amusing story to us about being in the shower during a similar tour. The gist of the story was that this particular group of visitors were somewhat shocked by the sight of Maryanne standing naked under the shower in broad daylight, yet she was essentially unfazed by the experience of being viewed naked, as it was a common enough experience at Cedar River.

This last statement was further explained to me when, a few weeks later, while en route to one of the teaching spaces where I believed I might find the mother of the child who had been left in my care, I came across a group of naked people dancing. I asked the only person there who I recognised if they had seen Eve, the woman I was looking for. I was shocked when I was told that I should not have come to the teaching space, due to the nudity that was on display. I could not understand why it was suddenly taboo to be in view of others who were naked, considering I had seen people swimming naked in the creek or walking around mostly unclothed on very hot days, not to mention Maryanne's comment during the orientation. It was then explained to me that the group of people dancing were in the *process* of accepting their bodies as part of the personal growth course that was taking place. I had intruded, but only because this was a group of people who had not yet come to fully accept their own nakedness, unlike most of us actually residing at Cedar River. I apologised, left the child to find her mother and headed off back towards the communal living space.

I did not become aware of any boundaries on nudity among community *residents*, however, until the day that Jim decided to stage a peaceful protest. Upon sitting down next to him for a chat on the lawn during lunch, I realised he was wearing bra over his naked chest which read "until all chests are free". I enquired as to his meaning and he explained to me that it was Cedar River policy that women could not be bare-chested on the front lawn due to its proximity to the parking lot, which was the first point of entry onto the property for members of the general public. Jim disagreed with this policy, feeling it was discriminatory, and therefore not aligned with the values and ethics of the community. Furthermore, he felt that shielding members of the public from topless nudity was essentially just buying into the mainstream American phobia of public nudity.

As we can see, nudity held culturally specific connotations and I am therefore suggesting that, in part, pleasure was derived from being naked in the hot tub precisely because nudity was experienced as an act of liberation from societal norms. Other contextual aspects also contributed to the experience of pleasure in the hot tub, though perhaps not as explicitly. The very fact that there was a hot tub to sit in at Cedar River, a community which values voluntary simplicity, contributed to the residents experience of pleasure. Hot tubs are generally thought of as frivolous luxuries, but because the hot tub was built in such a way as to be aligned with the communal goals of sustainable living, the residents were able to enjoy the luxury, while also demonstrating adherence to their values. Furthermore, the hot tub provided a space for socially enjoying the non-human environment, as it was situated on the edge of a large open meadow, a location which, on clear nights, afforded a stunning view of the night sky and unperturbed wildlife. Many a conversation in the hot tub revolved around the intimate experience of the non-human environment one could have while sitting there, an interest that was part of the cultural undercurrent at Cedar River.

<u>Conceptual Understanding - Communal Festivity</u>

The cultural specificity of the pleasure experienced at open microphone nights is perhaps less visible. There is, however, at least one notable feature of this monthly festive event that is most certainly culturally specific if we agree that regular communal festivities, in which the consumers are also the creators of their own

music, dancing, comedy, etc. (in Ehrenreich's distinction, the consumers are a crowd, not an audience), do not receive overwhelming socio-cultural support among the American mainstream population (2007). Festivities of this type are often associated with hedonistic sub-cultures, characterised by the stereotypical "sex, drugs and rock n roll" of the 1960s and 70s. That being the case, by culturally valuing the participatory nature of the open microphone nights due to the experience of communal joy it affords residents, the Cedar River community has once again set itself up in opposition to perceived mainstream American cultural values, thereby allowing residents to derive pleasure from the cultural specificity of the event.

This was evidenced in the pride certain residents seemingly took in what resulted from these events. For instance, after just a couple of open microphone nights, one community resident, Roger, began recording the performances and made copies of the CDs available for those who were interested. It was not uncommon to walk into the kitchen during Roger's cook shift and hear the most recent open microphone recordings being played over the communal speakers, while those present remarked on some impressive or amusing aspect of the event. What makes this remarkable is that, for the most part, the performances were not of a standard that would inspire re-listening unless, of course, one had some vested interest in them being valued. I would argue that Roger, and certain other residents, viewed these recordings as evidence of the communal joy that was created at Cedar River, and therefore derived pleasure from them beyond a purely aesthetic sort.

Play and the Unreflective Experience of Well-being

Egocentric, Sociocentric and Objective Assessment of Subjective Experience

Pleasure, we can all agree, is an experience of positive affect resulting from some form of stimulus. Therefore, the experience of pleasure is intimately linked to the pursuit of well-being. However, this must not be confused with the *pursuit* of pleasure, which is somewhat of a different matter and is discussed briefly later on in the chapter in relation to personal pursuits. The experience of pleasure I have hitherto been discussing I argue is the result of a self-conscious process of linking certain behaviours and activities to corresponding cultural morals and values. In other words, pleasure in this context, contributes to well-being in much the same way as the standard well-being meetings sought to: through residents reflectively

assessing themselves individually and as a communal whole. I have further suggested that the well-being derived from the hot tub and open microphone nights is both psychological and physiological. What I have not yet considered is the result of behaviours and activities that are carried out in such a way as does not evoke the process of self-reflectively, or at least seems to avert the reflective gaze.

I think it goes without saying that at least some residents of Cedar River derived a personal sense of pleasure from both the hot tub and open microphone nights that led to an experience of well-being which was not explicitly identified as one of the communal values relating to well-being. These experiences are what I refer to as the unreflective experiences of well-being, as they are experiences that do not require the residents to take an objective assessment of their own state of being to be recognised as such (i.e. they are still consciously experienced), yet at the same time struggle to find articulation due to their personal and idiosyncratic nature. These unreflective experiences, I argue, occur by virtue of assuming an alternate mode of engagement with one's environment, namely allowing oneself to play.

It must be remembered that these experiences are not mutually exclusive of self-reflective experiences of well-being, but rather have a tendency to overlap or become blurred. In other words, I am suggesting that some experiences of well-being fail to be articulated as such by those who have the experience because the person having the experience has assumed a mode of experiencing their environment that takes him/her beyond the reflexive self in the moment, but nonetheless can be recognised or felt as an experience of well-being. This is not depriving the person experiencing the phenomenon of agency, but merely recognising that some experiences take us outside ourselves and do not find expression through cognitive channels. Furthermore, this suggestion implies that some experiences through which subjective well-being is improved are not fully intentional. Through the following discussion, I seek to clarify what I mean by juxtaposing the analysis of well-being meetings and hot tub and open microphone nights given earlier in the chapter - which primarily was informed by communal conceptions of well-being - with an alternate analysis that highlights the role of play.

While well-being meetings generally employed the tools taught in the personal development courses, they were not restricted to those activities. I attended

at least a few well-being meetings at Cedar River that stepped outside of the emotion work format and attempted to conceptualise well-being from a different perspective. For instance, there was a well-being games night in which we played silly games and ate delicious desserts. This was explicitly labelled an evening of "play" by the well-being facilitator, Kate. Play was also evoked by the open microphone and hot tub nights. Residents undoubtedly attended these leisure activities to participate in activities that had no specific objective outside of the activity itself in order to knowingly prompt a "playful disposition", which is an additional reason why they are associated with well-being (Malaby 2008: 10).

What makes these experiences of well-being distinct from the others I have hitherto discussed is that the goods derived from the playful aspects of the hot tub and open microphone nights, as well as the unconventional well-being meetings dedicated to play, though clearly associated with well-being by community residents, fail to be fully articulated as such. This, I argue is a result of the type of experience one derives from play. Malaby (2008) has suggested that play becomes most useful anthropologically if it is understood as a mode of engaging the world, rather than an actual form of activity. This conception proves helpful in understanding what I am attempting to describe as the difference between self-reflective and unreflective experiences of well-being. According to Malaby's thinking, when one is playing, one steps outside of oneself and becomes immersed in the world of the activity until the point at which the activity ends or the player gets drawn back into a disposition that could no longer be described as playful.

This would suggest that, unlike the well-being derived from the standard well-being meetings or the culturally specific pleasures derived from the hot tub and open microphone nights - all of which involve processes of self-reflection and articulation in relation to communal values and morals - the well-being derived from activities in which the residents are playing, could be understood as unreflective. Additionally, it could be described as something 'other than intentional' for the same reasons. Simply put, when playing the residents are in fact enjoying themselves, thereby contributing to their pursuit of well-being; yet, they are not doing so by reflecting on themselves as persons that are pursuing well-being. This distinction can be clarified by making reference to Damasio's (2000) description of the two

types of consciousness: core consciousness and extended consciousness. Core consciousness simply provides an organism with a sense of self in the moment, whereas extended consciousness provides an organism with an identity, a history and a future (p.16). Therefore, I am suggesting that play evokes an experience from the level of core consciousness, whereas self-reflection derives from engagement of extended consciousness.

Short-term vs. Long-term Orientation

A tension arises, in the context of Cedar River however, due to the lack of communally sanctioned ways of articulating the value of the experience of well-being that is of an unreflective nature. In other words, while residents appear to be aware that activities can be valued for personal or private reasons, the well-being derived from such activities tends to become overshadowed by the need to experience well-being in terms of communal values and morals. This does not suggest a clear cut dichotomy of the individual versus the community, but rather a tension inherent in the communal need to be able to demonstrate well-being in an articulate manner. In particular, it highlights how the 'other than intentional' nature of play becomes a paradox in the context of intentional community.

As I have been arguing throughout this thesis, intentional communities are contexts which are particularly conducive to the experience of meaningful lives due to the fact that the values associated with everyday activities are made explicit, as well as being contexts in which superlatively meaningful goods – such as sustainability and well-being - are pursued. Play, and the well-being derived from it, becomes ambiguous in this context because it is neither explicitly tied to the values and morals of the community, nor is it articulable as a contribution to the communal pursuit of well-being due to the seemingly short-term orientation to well-being play implies (i.e. momentary pleasure). However, I am arguing that play does in fact contribute to the communal pursuit of well-being, as "leisure activities are essential components in all people's conceptions of the good life" (Thin 2009: 40). In other words, play is an essential factor for achieving the long-term goal of life satisfaction and a meaningful life. Thus we can conclude, paradoxically, that intentional community - or at least Cedar River - is dependant upon the provision of

opportunities to be 'other than intentional' in order to fulfil the long-term goals of the intentional community.

The Pursuit of Pleasure - Movies and Dance Dance Revolution

Egocentric and Objective Assessment of Subjective Experience

An additional tension existed in regard to both the conception and realisation of well-being at Cedar River which can be illuminated through the examples of Eldin and Darius, respectively. Eldin is a self-professed movie lover. After returning to his cabin each evening, he would generally spend his late night hours viewing films or episodes from one of the many HBO series he enjoyed. As part of nearly every trip into town, Eldin would visit the local library and exchange the films he had just watched for new ones. Sometimes he would offer to run a movie night in one of the smaller common areas, which was often accompanied by his amazing popcorn. I joined Eldin on many movie watching occasions and spoke with him often about movies one, or both, of us had seen. To watch Eldin watch a movie was to see someone wholly enveloped in the experience. To speak with him about a film was to see his face light up with excitement, particularly when he discussed his own emotional or physical reactions to the film. One day I shared with Eldin how much I truly enjoyed experiencing film with and through him, by telling him of the absolute joy that exuded from him on every occasion. He was completely taken aback and thanked me for valuing the pleasure and sheer inspiration for life that he derived from movie-watching.

Like Eldin, Darius also took great pleasure in an activity that occurred mainly in the privacy of his own cabin either alone or with a select group of residents. Dance Dance Revolution, an interactive dance-focussed video game, provided Darius with many an evening's entertainment. It was not uncommon to gaze over at his cabin around dinner time and see it shaking from the vigorous movement of the dancing going on inside. Darius invited me over to play on numerous occasions, each of which I interpreted as a sign that he was trying to make a connection with me. I did attend a handful of times, which after my first attempt was mostly to see the amazing spectacle that was Darius dancing. When his turn arrived, he would assume a poised position on the dance pad and look intently at the screen. Before one had a chance to think, his feet would be moving faster than light, his stare was

unmoved from the screen. Though he never described his experience as such, during Dance Dance Revolution Darius appeared to be more relaxed and joyful than he was at nearly any other time. It became clear to me that this was a well-being activity for Darius which failed to be recognised fully for its value, as one needed to observe the effect it had on him in order to appreciate the well-being it provided.

Short-term vs. Long-term Orientation

Eldin and Darius were both participating in their respective activities precisely because they were aware that these activities brought them pleasure. Indeed, there were probably countless such experiences for each resident which daily contributed to their own personal sense of well-being. However, one might argue that taking part in activities in the manner of Eldin and Darius, was pursuing pleasure in a selfish manner, thereby calling into question the pursuit of well-being in general. After all, while the well-being meetings, the hot tub and the open microphone nights were all analysed in relation to the pleasure, and ultimately the well-being, derived from the experiences, they could have been framed as planned communal pursuits of pleasure. This would likely have made them seem objectionable and narcissistic due to the short-term orientation to well-being that the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure implies (Thin 2009:33). Yet, framed as they were – as activities that enable residents to experience pleasure, and thus feel they are working towards one of their individual and communal projects (i.e. the pursuit of well-being) – they instead appear as useful strategies towards attaining a better life. In other words, they take on a long-term orientation to well-being. Thus, a tension existed between the conception of well-being as something pursued for selfish reasons via the excessive pursuit of pleasure, and well-being as a project that was geared towards increasing community-wide, and indeed worldwide, experiences of life satisfaction.

Conclusion

The first five chapters of this thesis describe, in turn, five domains of Cedar River life through which residents actively work to realise their goals, all of which are informed by beliefs, values and morals. Through the realisation of these goals, residents create the experience of a meaningful existence for themselves and (potentially) their community. Arguably, the pursuit of well-being is one of two projects that bring the Cedar River residents, and their daily activities, together as a

whole (the other being the pursuit of sustainability). Thus the pursuit of well-being works to confer superlative meaning on the lives of Cedar River residents. This, however, does not necessarily make Cedar River residents distinct from other Americans, or other humans, for that matter. If well-being is understood to be at least partially derived from the ability to attain one's goals, than we would expect that most human beings spend some portion of their lives reflecting on how well their process of goal achievement is going (Nesse 2004). Rather, what is distinctive about Cedar River, and perhaps many intentional communities, in relation to the ambient society, is the value placed on the self-conscious assessment of well-being in one's daily activities.

Cedar River residents seek to promote personal and communal flourishing by outlining daily what that flourishing should look like. This point was evident in each of the first five chapters which explore community building, interpersonal relationships, governance, food, and human-environment interaction, respectively. Each chapter examined the communally valued ways of participating in the various activities involved with these aspects of Cedar River life and articulated the value derived from them through the residents' experiences. By analysing each realm of Cedar River life in this way, I sought to both convey the diversity of experience among residents and the inherent tension that exists between communally recognised value and personally recognised value. I am now suggesting that this tension is inherent due to the nature of well-being as both culturally significant and assessable, and personally experienced and inarticulable. In other words, well-being is contingent.

People move to Cedar River to pursue well-being, in whatever form, as a project through which they hope to create meaning in their lives, and well-being is defined in certain culturally specific ways so as to provide a means of assessing progress. However, it may not be possible to continue to feel well if, as a resident, one ceases to find the activities that are meant to add to communal well-being, fulfilling. Unfortunately, these activities are derived from the mission statement and are required in order to provide organisational legitimacy, which in turn is societal legitimacy. Without some sense of societal legitimacy, that is, working towards articulate goals and realising certain values, life begins to feel meaningless. The

result of this scenario is structural tension that can not be resolved without adjusting the structure to better fit the realities of pursuing well-being or continually recreating the residential make-up of the community - both of which seem to occur on a fairly regular basis at Cedar River, and, arguably, most intentional communities. It is due in part due to this dynamism that Cedar River possesses the ability to provide countless residents with a context for the realisation of life as meaningful.

The analysis of well-being as a project at Cedar River has not only enlightened us on the ways in which well-being was being conceived of among residents, but has also shown us how the values, beliefs and morals that drive the community inform the residents' conceptual experience of goal attainment and thus assessment of meaning in their daily lives. The self-reflective gaze, which is aimed at assessing the long-term, evaluative, objective and (mainly) sociocentric nature of Cedar River's mission statement, provides one method of understanding the pursuit of well-being as it has been constructed at Cedar River. Another method is to be found in the unreflective – and 'other than intentional' - experience of residents who participate in activities as part of everyday life. However, due to the (seemingly) short-term, experiential, subjective and (seemingly) egocentric nature of these experiences, they fail to be fully articulated as contributing to the pursuit of well-being, and are thus overshadowed by communal conceptions of well-being. This is essentially a struggle between the planned and intentional dimension of intentional community and that of the unplanned and spontaneous experience. Thus, a tension is created between being well, by communal assessments, and feeling well experientially in one's daily life.

The everyday activities of Cedar River residents are guided by transformation, from existing ways of conceptualising and experiencing life, to new and potentially more fulfilling ways. As I have argued, the pursuit of well-being, as well as the pursuit of sustainability, can be understood as a project through which the daily work of both individuals and the community-as-a-whole is able to confer superlative meaning on the lives of residents. However, the fact remains that Cedar River, and intentional community more generally, is a place of comings and goings, which suggests that, although residents derive meaning from their experiences, this does not ultimately convince them to continue living at Cedar River.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the distinctive socio-cultural world of intentional community residents, particularly the ways in which daily activities are explicitly tied to beliefs, values and morals in the intentional community context, as well as the ways through which support is given for the pursuit of projects that reach beyond the self. As a result, intentional community was understood throughout the thesis in terms of its conduciveness as a context for the realisation of meaningful lives, more than as an experiment in 'community' or an attempt in devising alternative social models which might succeed or fail due to various factors. Consequently, community residents were understood as agents who were pursuing meaning through 'the life of action' (Pihlström 2007), as they had actively chosen to live in intentional community in order to enhance their own way of life and, in the longer term, the experience of living in contemporary America.

The main argument of the thesis - being that intentional community is *experienced* by its residents as more conducive to the realisation of meaningful lives than 'mainstream' contexts in contemporary America - emerged in response to the need to reconcile the fact that so many individuals who imagined that they would spend many years of their lives at Cedar River chose to leave after just a few years for one reason or another; yet, almost without fail, reflected on their experiences of living at Cedar River as some of the most important and meaningful experiences in their lives. The story of Arthur, relayed in the Introduction to the thesis, is a prime example of this very point and was particularly well suited to analysis, as I was resident at Cedar River during Arthur's residency, as well as being in touch with him throughout his process of leaving and re-locating. However, my discussions and interviews with a variety of past and short-term residents all led me to this same point, thus making the suggestion that intentional community is a context which is particularly conducive to the experience of living a meaningful life worthy of interrogation and exploration.

Nevertheless, in no way does my argument try to discount the fact that the particular ways in which 'community' was conceived of by Cedar River residents is of significance. Rather, as was argued in Chapter One, intentional community

provides an exemplary case for the anthropological analysis of 'community' as the realisation of 'community' is an explicit goal of intentional community residents. As such, community presents itself as an ongoing process of re/imagination and negotiation on the part of the individuals involved (Rapport 2002) wherein diverse meanings, derived from shared values, culminate in a shared form (Cohen 1985). More specifically, community, as viewed through the lens of intentional community, comes into being both through the quality of sociality experienced by residents daily, as well as through continuing processes of identification with group and place.

However, unlike most previous analyses of intentional community, in this thesis focus was placed on everyday activity in order that the distinct socio-cultural processes in evidence at Cedar River could be seen for the meaningful contribution they made to the lives of residents. Activities associated with five different domains of social life were examined, thereby illuminating how the explicitness of value attached to the processes involved with personal and communal goal fulfilment provided residents with the experience of living a meaningful life. Additionally, the two projects in evidence at Cedar River – being the pursuits of sustainability and well-being - were analysed in relation to the activities that were explicitly carried out in their pursuit in order that Cedar River be understood as a context which promoted opportunities through which superlative meaning might be conferred on the lives of residents. Thus, the thesis argued, in alignment with Levy (2005), that there are two levels of meaning which might be applied to an individual's life: ordinary meaning which is achieved through the pursuit of goods deemed valuable by the individual and superlative meaning which is achieved through the pursuit of highly valuable common goods.

Alternative Realities- A View Towards Social Change

Ethnographic Contribution

As was highlighted in each of the seven chapters of this thesis, the beliefs, values and morals attached to everyday activities at Cedar River were predominantly pitted against 'mainstream' American norms. That being the case, the ways in which residents articulated these values vis-à-vis social and environmental processes is of interest anthropologically, as they are able to inform us of the taken for granted socio-cultural influences that shape individuals' ways of being, and vice versa. For

instance, in Chapter Two we saw how the social displays of bodily and emotional intimacy at Cedar River became the terrain of much ambiguity as residents attempted to challenge normative beliefs regarding familial relations, sex and sexuality. This, I argued, was due to the dominant conceptualisation of intimacy in American, and indeed Western, society as something reserved for private encounters with friends, lovers, and parents and children. Thus we discover that the possibility of creating a more meaningful life through placing intimacy at the centre of sociality, while clearly having its rewards, is nonetheless problematic as it requires a reconsideration of how we characterise *all* of our interpersonal relationships.

Likewise, in Chapter Five, 'alternative' food-related practices were analysed in order to reveal the political, economical and historical motivations behind subscription to such practices. As it turned out, the labels of "vegetarian" and "organic" used by Cedar River to advertise their food offerings were symbols for a much more complex set of practices informed by a whole host of conflicting beliefs and values. In fact, it seemed clear that these labels were used mainly to appeal to a certain popularised understanding of what 'alternative' food practices represent. In reality, Cedar River was comprised of meat-eaters, freegans, locavores and everything in between. Thus, it can be argued that subscription to certain food-related practices contribute to the experience of living a meaningful life both due to the articulable identity they might ascribe to an individual or a group, but also through their ability to allow for the individualised embodiment of beliefs and ethics.

How the present thesis on intentional community contributes to anthropological knowledge - in an ethnographic sense - most explicitly, then, is through the detailed description (provided throughout each chapter) of everyday activities in a context which is intentionally being re/created as socio-culturally distinct by its inhabitants so as to achieve certain explicit goals. In other words, this thesis ethnographically explores the distinctiveness of a context that is ultimately concerned with social change. Considered from this perspective, it becomes clear why intentional communities possess the distinctive qualities of: everyday explicitness of values and support for the pursuit of projects that reach beyond the self. Intentional communities possess these socio-cultural distinctions because their ultimate concern is with social change, which requires demonstrability of the specific

aspects of the community's chosen lifestyle which are thought to be beneficial for the ambient society in order that said aspects might be used for a model.

Meaningful Lives - Exposing the Contradictions in a Context of Value

Theoretical Contribution

The fact that intentional community is a context within which individuals' daily activities are explicitly tied to beliefs, values and morals is crucial to the argument made in this thesis regarding residents' experiences of comparatively more meaningful lives in said context. As was mentioned in Chapter One, Robinson (2007:42) refers to such contexts as "contexts of value", as they are contexts which bind individuals together due to a shared set of values (p.45). Significantly, Robinson argues that such contexts are critical for the realisation of meaningful lives as they allow individuals to be connected to common goods that extend beyond the self. Thus, explicitness of shared values in everyday life, which happens to be a defining characteristic of intentional community, can be directly linked to the experience of living a meaningful life. This emerged most evidently throughout the thesis in the form of discussions regarding the processes related to identity and selfhood.

As was mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, our identities are "multiple, produced within discourse and potentially contradictory" (Kondo 1990:36), yet crucial for the production of meaning. Therefore, identifying with someone or something, via the expression of beliefs, values and morals, provides us with a method of ascribing meaning to the various activities we take part in throughout our everyday social lives. Additionally, the identities we claim for ourselves contribute to our overall experience of self. Thus, carrying-out daily activities according to explicit beliefs, values and morals works to cultivate particular types of selves that are associated with said beliefs, values and morals.

In Chapter Three we saw how consensus decision-making within the organisational structure at Cedar River worked to produce selves that were experienced as something akin to egalitarian. Thus, when Cedar River underwent an organisational restructure in the face of economic hardship and member burn-out, the strong link between social organisation, identity (and by extension, selfhood) and the ability to live a meaningful life was brought to the surface. With the introduction of bureaucratic structures came the threat to egalitarian ideals which acted as defining

identity markers for a large portion of Cedar River residents. Consequently, the membership of Cedar River was much altered, as the struggle for finding a workable solution to the community's needs left many feeling they could no longer experience their own lives at Cedar River as meaningful. In other words, the very fluidity of self (Gergen 1991) that allowed Cedar River residents to emphasize communal needs (as was discussed in Chapter Two) also works in "sustaining the right of withdrawal" (ibid:197) for individuals who feel a threat to his/her ability to assert one's self (Thomson 1997:651).

However, as was also noted in the Introduction, selfhood is constituted in relation to what is 'other', as much as it is constituted through the triggering of emotions within the body. In other words, selfhood is constituted through a variety of processes, some of which are reflective and others which are essentially unreflective. It is here that we expose the other tension inherent in intentional community. To put it clearly, intentional community cultivates the production of self and meaning through processes of reflection, the outcomes of which are evidenced through daily activities which speak to the beliefs, values and morals the intentional community residents claim to hold. Thus, daily activities (i.e. practice) become articulable as examples of conscious acts made in the name of social change and residents (i.e. agents) are able to experience themselves as meaningfully engaged with their world as progress towards said change is continually addressed in the processes of self-reflection.

And yet, practice - or the carrying out of everyday activity - can also be unreflective; this nonetheless also leads one to the experience of living a meaningful life. As we saw in Chapter Seven, play - being a way of engaging in the world that is unreflective - is essential for experiencing life as meaningful; however, it fails to be fully recognised in the intentional community context as it involves acts which are 'other than intentional' and thus are not assessable for purposes of creating a model for social change.

These tensions or contradictions are interesting theoretically for anthropology as they force us to think about how socio-cultural conditions both create and inhibit individuals' experiences self and meaning. Much of the thesis suggests that individuals chose to live at Cedar River in order to allow for an experience of self

that was not accessible as part of the American 'mainstream' - that is, one in which everyday activities work to re/create a recognisably moral self. However, there are also implications throughout which suggest that residing at an intentional community may inhibit certain aspects of self from being recognised due to the focus on articulable goals, thereby resulting in a loss of meaning. Thus, the flip side of the benefit of infusing everyday actions with explicit beliefs, values and morals is also - ultimately - what makes intentional communities, like Cedar River, a place of comings and goings. To be more specific, because intentional communities require morality to be enacted intentionally due to their focus on social change, the moralities that are enacted unreflectively fail to be recognised for the contribution they make to the experience of living a meaningful life and this systematic side-lining of unintentionally can eventually lead individuals to the decision to leave the community.

Furthermore, it is essentially because of this fact - that morality is enacted intentionally in the context of intentional community - that my chosen methodology was an interpretive one, focussed on residents' experiences of everyday activity, as my goal was to understand why residents *experienced* their lives as comparatively more meaningful in the context of intentional community. Had I used a methodology informed by, for instance, phenomenology - which seeks to access the unreflective dimension of activity - this thesis would have been at odds with the very nature of intentional community.

Is Cedar River a Unique Case?

Of course, it must be remembered that Cedar River is only one intentional community among many. While all intentional communities are similar due to the fact that they place a high value on 'community', as was discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, there are multiple ways of understanding and realising this goal. Moreover, each intentional community has its own set of common beliefs, values and morals which act as a uniting force. Thus, in order to suggest how the present research on Cedar River informs our knowledge of intentional community more generally, I will offer a final comparison with a type of intentional community that, superficially, appears quite different from Cedar River - namely, Hutterite communities.

Hutterites are a communal religious sect which originated in the Austrian Empire during the 16th century. In the late 19th century, after hundreds of years of persecution for their 'radical' Anabaptist[27] beliefs, little more than a thousand Hutterites emigrated to North America, some of which established communal homesteads. The offspring of these original immigrants continue to exist today in "more than 300 colonies located in the Plains states and the western provinces of Canada" (Huffman 2000:550). Thus, although most Hutterite communities divide when they reach the size of approximately 130 residents (ibid), the overall Hutterite way of life has sustained itself communally for longer than any other known intentional community.

Hutterite communities are governed in a hierarchical manner, with baptised males forming the "voting group" which has the authority to carry out organisational governance as is dictated by the "central beliefs", or charter, which is derived from the Judeo-Christian religion (Hostetler 1974:29). However, all Hutterites are said to participate in governance insofar as they hold a common will to abide by their central beliefs, thereby carrying out the objectives of the community. Thus, the entirety of community life is centred on a set of core beliefs, values and morals, understood to be prescribed by the will of God, which dictates daily practice (Deets 1975: 16-25).

Hostetler argues that Hutterites tend to experience their lives within their communities as meaningful, though much, if not all, of this meaning is derived from the Hutterite adherence to their religious beliefs which, if followed according to the charter, will deliver them into the eternal kingdom of God. Thus, the focus of everyday life is ultimately to work towards salvation in the afterlife. However, Hostetler also points out that Hutterites tend to suffer inordinately from *Anfechtung*, a mental illness similar to depression in which the sufferer withdraws from their community due to overwhelming feelings of having sinned (p.263). Psychologists have explained the significant occurrence of this illness among Hutterites as a result of the huge pressure put on individuals to conform and adhere to the Hutterite beliefs, values and morals. Therefore, while everyday activities contribute to an

[27] Anabaptists are Christians who came about as a result of the Radical or Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Unlike other Christians, Anabaptists derive their beliefs about the world directly from literal translations of The Sermon on the Mount. Anabaptists also adhere to the practice of credobaptism, hence the name.

overall experience of living a meaningful life for Hutterites, the same daily tasks may contribute to individuals' ill-being. This ill-being, however, is not generally a motivating force for abandoning the community. Rather, the community, through its adherence to the 'central beliefs', works to rehabilitate sufferers, thus maintaining community coherence and endurance.

Given this brief overview of Hutterite communities, what useful comparisons might be made between the socio-cultural relations that determine the everyday experience of life for Hutterites, and those that determine the experiences of Cedar River residents? Throughout the thesis, I have argued that the various daily activities which Cedar River residents take part in are imbued with explicit beliefs, values and morals and thus the carrying out of these everyday activities work to create the experience of living a meaningful life for residents so long as their individual beliefs, values and morals remain aligned with those of the community. I therefore analysed activities related to the actualisation of community, intimate sociality, egalitarianism, permaculture (and other environmental discourses), food-related ideologies, sustainability and well-being and suggested how these activities functioned in the lives of Cedar River residents. Similarly, the Hutterites have been analysed in regard to how the various realms of everyday life are tied to their central beliefs and how working towards the realisation of the objectives defined by their central beliefs creates meaning in their lives.

What is clear from comparing these two analyses, then, is that both types of intentional community function in a similar manner - that is, by setting objectives through adherence to certain core beliefs, morals and values, the realisation of which works to create the experience of a meaningful life for its residents. Thus, it cannot be argued to be the case that adherence to one set of beliefs, values or morals is more likely to create meaning over another. However, it could be argued that intentional communities, like that of the Hutterites, which have clearly and fairly narrowly defined objectives due to adherence to beliefs and morals which have been dictated from an unquestionable authority (in their case, religion) are more likely to provide meaning for their residents for longer periods of time, provided said communities have not become dysfunctional. In other words, intentional communities, such as Cedar River, who have objectives which are very loosely defined due to adherence to

an extremely dispersed set of beliefs, values and morals (in their case, ecological and broadly social), are more likely to prove meaningful for the lives of residents in a fleeting manner.

A Look to the Future

The argument made throughout the thesis, then, amounts to the claim that Cedar River, and intentional community more broadly, is a context that is experienced as more conducive for the realisation of a meaningful life than most other contexts in contemporary America precisely because residents are enabled to live according to explicit beliefs, values and morals, as well as pursue goods that extend beyond the self. Furthermore, intentional community has these distinct qualities because, ultimately, it is concerned with social change and thus demonstrability of the specific aspects of their chosen lifestyle which are thought to be of benefit to the ambient society is required. This is significant, regardless of whether or not the intentional community in question remains in existence for a long period of time, or is a place of comings and goings, or proves itself to be a viable social model for future generations. Its significance lies in the way that group and individual intentions, when fostered, provides people with meaning, as they are better able to realise their beliefs, values and morals through identifiable goals and the visceral experience of working towards projects that reach beyond the self.

Consequently, the argument made in this thesis contributes to both the current knowledge on intentional community, as well as the knowledge on meaningful lives, due to the methodological emphasis placed on everyday activity. Furthermore, it points towards the importance of the recent move among intentional community seekers in much of the Western world towards the construction of eco-villages. Although minimal academic research has so far been conducted in the context of self-identified aspiring eco-villages[28], as I mentioned in Chapter Four, I would suggest that this particular form of intentional community is becoming more popular due to the emphasis eco-village models place on integration with the ambient society.

At Cedar River, difficulties were often encountered in areas of daily life that required dealing with the ambient society, for instance state-imposed economic requirements or county-wide building codes, which led to feelings of frustration

[28] I am aware that Cedar River now identifies as such.

among community residents who were striving to attain goals which said requirements and codes impeded. Within the eco-village model, however, communities would be working with local and state governments to provide viable ways for pursuing as many goals as possible, rather than keeping themselves separate or outside to a large degree. Thus, the eco-village model works to better integrate the benefits received from the intentional community context into the wider society so that an increasing number of individuals might access opportunities to improve the quality of their lives through meaningful and engaging experiences.

When I left the field, and judging by subsequent contact with research participants still living there, Cedar River certainly appeared to be more concretely working in the direction of the eco-village. Perhaps this is the logical next step in working towards their projects of sustainability and well-being. In any case, I dare say that those that are currently living there and working, daily, to move Cedar River in this direction, have chosen to do so because they think their work is worth it; and thus, they are experiencing their lives as meaningful.

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